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A TROOPER OF THE EMPRESS

A TROOPER OF THE EMPRESS

BY

CLINTON ROSS
AUTHOR OF
CHALMETTE, THE MEDDLING HUSSY, ETC.

"And a trooper of the Empress, if you please——"
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TO

CHARLES A. WATROUS, Esq.

At New York, February, 1898.

PROLOGUE.

Oh, well, said Burns, who was near Nature, "a man's a man for a' that"—for all of all things. This is no particular story, although it may deal with South Africa; it's just in proof of the assertion of the inspired Scot.

Let men talk and quibble; give me the man who does things. Let him fail, but let him rise from failure.

But this story is not mine; it's John Barton's, who saw and knew it all, as he will tell you. It's a story of the new land and of the man who failed and succeeded, of a nation's policy and a strong man's mysticism; of Fraser of Glencoe, and of Maisie Halton; and of Tirwin, the financier, who put a trade's in-

terest above the interest in woman or the respect for other men's rights.

It begins with what happened at Riminjie and at Gilmer's in —— I have forgotten the year. But here it begins, if you will listen. May you listen as rapt as the Arabians who heard the Nights at the end of a lazy day.

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A TROOPER OF THE EMPRESS.

CHAPTER I.

A MAN OF BROKEN FORTUNE.

THE messenger had come down from Gilmer's, asking Bagley to send as many men as he could. Gula and many thousands of his warriors had started the fight again; the Company's property might be lost, as it had been a year before; the miners had all flocked in, and with the women and children, and the few men he had, Pierson of Gilmer's hardly knew whether he could hold out. As old Bagley sighed over the situation—he was one of those young men who are called old—another messenger came clattering over the

veldt. The Belas were below, as well as above, at Gilmer's. It would be foolhardy in the extreme to take many from Riminjie, poorly garrisoned at the best.

He had nothing to do indeed but to send down to Colonel Hennessy at Cloutsie, and then to wait for reinforcements. But the sweat started as he thought of those at Gilmer's. By the time Hennessy's force would reach Riminjie not only all at Gilmer's might be massacred, but the whole North of Belaland lost to the Company. Bagley was not then, more than at any time in his career, the man to sit pining over any situation; few of the Company's officers are. He called out Willing to lay the situation before the men, and to find if he could not get twenty to ride from Riminjie and try to throw themselves into Gilmer's. Bagley thought he could spare twenty—that Riminjie, so reduced, still could hold its own until the detachment from Hennessy came.

The Belaland police are as mixed a lot as any in the world; your gentleman elbows a

poor fellow from the paternal estate, your Colonial, and your Scotchman, or Irishman; there your sorry adventurer is faced by your simple honest man; men brought together in short from the world over out of the spirit of simple adventure, or of mere personal profit, or of both, and more.

Willing, Bagley's only commissioned officer, was a fair-haired youngster, the son of one of the Company's officials. It occurred to Bagley that this boy was the only one to whom he could give the command; and yet, he added, there might be possibilities among the men at Riminjie. Bagley, newly arrived at that post, was not so entirely sure of the personnel of his men; and he hesitated about letting Willing lead such an expedition. It seemed almost certain death to many if not to all of them.

The case was plainly put; Bagley stated it very simply; he felt he must do something to help Pierson's command, and the miners, and the few women and children at Gilmer's Krall. Women and children

shouldn't be allowed up there anyway, he ended in a bit of anger. But they were, and there was prospect of losing all this territory to the Company, if not to the Empire; since Portugal, or the Dutch, might step in. He didn't ask a man of them to take the risk, the major went on—there's never much pyrotechnical language about such an exhortation, on such an occasion, among Anglo-Saxons. And in that crowd there were enough to cross over; they were much the same order of men as those who went into the Transvaal with Jameson.

The score were easily found out of fifty volunteers. In Willing's selection, Bagley noticed a tall, broad-shouldered, red-haired man, with gray eyes and firm lips, and thin sunburned cheeks; a man with a soldier's swing and a gentleman's expression; perhaps of forty, who had seen, done, or suffered much, or, as we say, a man who knows something of the world. Bagley wondered where he had seen him. He called:

"Your name is——?"

"Fraser," said the man.

"Not——?" Bagley began with a rush of recollection, and with more wonder.

"Yes—once of the Seventieth Bengal," the man said, without moving a muscle. "MacIvor Fraser; it has been held a good Scottish name."

"Yes, in the service, too; in the service, too," Bagley went on, with a sudden kindliness toward him. "I know all about you, Captain ——. But I should have been told you were here."

"Not 'Captain' now," Fraser said cynically, and with a little laugh.

"In the Belaland Company's service you can have a chance. Ah, I know what I am driving at. You were the man who did that thing among the Afghans. That was masterly; that was like this," Bagley added, taking Fraser's measure. "The fact of the matter is, I have none but non-commissioned officers, save Mr. Willing. I prefer—well, to make the matter short, you brought an expedition to a success—that Afghan affair, I

mean, near like this. I am going to take a liberty——"

"You forget there was another motive," Fraser interrupted quickly.

"I never believed it," said Bagley.

"But I confessed it."

"I don't care," the other went on. "I am in command here, and, in my perplexing position, I must decide for myself. I ask you, who know these things better than I, to do this for me, for the Company."

"I thank you," the other said grimly. "I don't think you are mistaken, Major Bagley. As you say, I have done something like this before; I would like much to try, I confess. And——"

He paused as if gauging the words—"My own observations of other men are that they are sometimes the safer to intrust with an important matter, simply because they may have made a mistake."

"Your record was so good, Captain——"

"Mr. will do me," the other said. "I am still, too, MacIvor Fraser of Glencoe."

"I know," Bagley said. "You have been talked over, you know, and who does not know the Frasers of Glencoe? As for the Barkur affair——"

Bagley hesitated.

"They call me Fraser of Barkur," the man said, shrugging his great shoulders; for he was built a large man.

Bagley still was scanning him attentively.

"Your volunteering shows where your heart is; and there is beyond Fraser of Glencoe, and Fraser of Barkur, Fraser of Trucknow," he said.

Then, having decided, he turned to the others.

"Men," said the major, "Lieutenant Willing has, I think, stated the situation to you. Chief Gula and his warriors are about Gilmer's. Captain Pierson has sent for help, and almost as this news comes there's the other, that below us are Bela warriors. All of our force are needed here, then. For what may happen before Colonel Hennessy can reach us from Cloutsie, who can tell? But

I can't leave North Belaland alone. So I have asked twenty of you to try to reach Gilmer's, to give Captain Pierson heart. Fifty have offered, and the twenty have been chosen. And I have found among you the man to lead you, a Scottish gentleman, Fraser of Glencoe, a soldier of the Empire, Fraser, who took Trucknow from the Afghans."

"He? Is that Fraser, the Fraser? Fraser of Trucknow? Fraser of Barkur?"

And one said in a louder tone, "Fraser of Barkur," so that Bagley heard.

But Fraser stood there with folded arms, his face in unflinching fixity. "Yes, Fraser of Barkur," he said, advancing; "if Major Bagley will allow me, the officer who is said to have turned over Barkur, and to have escaped himself; I am he. But there was another time—when it was not so—when it was Trucknow, not Barkur. And Major Bagley, knowing something of my other record, and that I have had experience in such matters, has asked me to lead this little expedition, to try and see what I can do."

He paused and looked at them, and because many of them were men of sorry pasts, they understood him.

"He? Fraser of Glencoe!" they said. "He's Fraser, to be sure; but who thought of him as that man?"

And one little fellow piped up. "Why, he was the fellow who went to the devil in Kimberly—between drinking and gaming."

"Oh," retorted another, "he's not the only man who has been to the devil and has come back from him by way of the veldt. As for Barkur, who knows what there was about it? There were only two men to tell the story, he and MacDonald, and MacDonald was exonerated on Fraser's statement. Besides, old Bagley has no one, as he says, to send. Who of us has had Fraser's experience? And then he was born a Fraser of Glencoe, and he did that other thing at Trucknow. And he doesn't look like the man who did that thing at Barkur. It's unbelievable, as he stands there."

Willing, the subaltern, meantime had

been strengthening his memory of the Barkur affair.

"Good gad, Willing," cried a man who had known many wars in India, and about China, and among the Boers and the Zulus, "you ought to remember the details. It's a curious thing that a man gets to associate a name with something good or bad, you know. It's a bad thing he did, or it's a good one. So when you say 'Barkur,' and what Fraser did there, it seems as if nothing more could be said; as if, in fact, the whole bad story was told. Well, it was this way, I remember. MacDonald commanded at Barkur, and he was said to be inefficient, and Fraser, who had done so much among the Afghans, was sent out to take his place. But Fraser was too late, or too early, whichever it was. The Rajah, whose disquiet he had come to settle, for he had a rare tact with those fellows as well as a name for bravery—the Rajah had risen, had seized on MacDonald, who was abroad in the town; and he caught Fraser, too, with his men, and held them as

hostages. Meanwhile the garrison got wind of it, and shut itself up; but in some way it was taken; every mother's son of a fine lot of fellows as ever English sun rose on were cut down, save two who ran for it in some way. And reaching our lines these two told how a signed order had come from MacDonald or Fraser, ordering the lieutenant to open the gates; and on the strength of that they were thrown open. Just after this some of our men, coming up, took the Rajah of Barkur's son; and we said, if either MacDonald or Fraser were touched, the heir of the Rajah of Barkur would be strung up, and the Rajah himself would be banished forever, and his cousin should reign in his place. Well, so it happened; MacDonald and Fraser were released. And the inquiry was made. The old Rajah killed himself about this time, and of course his value as a witness ended. Then the two fugitives' evidence was taken, and it was very uncertain whether, in their excitement afterward, they had clearly understood what really had hap-

pened; whether indeed the message had been brought to the lieutenant, or whether the fort had been carried by assault. MacDonald said he had been tortured to give such an order, but that he hadn't. Fraser kept very quiet, saying nothing at first. And then there came his voice, low and broken, unlike himself, for he was always so firm a chap. He said that he had been put to the torture, and thrown into a fever, and, in the delirium, he might have done it—he might not have done it. Then it was shown that indeed the lieutenant of the garrison, knowing that MacDonald was a prisoner, and that he was superseded by Fraser, who was then famous for his skill in managing such an affair, might have accepted an order from Fraser to open the gates. For, you see, the uprising had just begun; there had been then no bloodshed. How should they know in the garrison but that the Rajah of Barkur's dissatisfaction had been settled by some diplomacy? The thing narrowed down to this, then; a paper had been presented to Mac-

Donald and Fraser under torture; MacDonald declared he had refused to sign it; Fraser was not sure but that in his delirium he had done it, though he knew certainly, he said, that so far as he was in his senses he never would, which was of course true.

"The thing was ugly enough, I can tell you; good British soldiers cut down like sheep. But Fraser was believed. No man for his years had done more for the Queen's rule in this generation. Who could deny that he might have lost his mind under torture? So it pointed to Fraser. But what could be done to a man, who, it was admitted, might have done it when mad? It was not conceivable that he, born a Fraser of Glencoe, from a line of soldiers, knowingly could have done it. He simply resigned. We know how he turned up at Kimberly, a broken-down man, a drunkard; we know he wandered up here and into this service, like many another of us, and this air and the life here straightened him up. We know how Bagley has been taken with him; that in the

light of what he did in India, before the Barkur time, he is just the man. Still there are men out here who never would want to follow him, unless at such a desperate time. I feel he has done it once, the brave thing—he may do it again. And he looks as if he would. Notice that length of limb, that clearness of the eye. Nothing but torture would have made him do it, and he has no knowledge the Belas could torture out of him; while these niggers haven't the cunning of the Indians. So I say, Bagley is all right."

"And MacDonald? What became of him?"

"Don't you know that story followed him, too? He's a retired brewer's son, a rich man, they say. He was called, more or less, MacDonald of Barkur, as Fraser was. Men say of the two, here are two men; one brave, a dare-devil, who couldn't stand torture."

"He did, he said, so long as he had his senses. It must be awful to have your joints racked, to cry out," said Willing doubtfully;

meaning that it is awful for an English officer and gentleman to show emotion.

"And the other—not so particularly brave in personal encounter—that MacDonald certainly might have given in when it came to torture. But bless me, I hope the Belas won't put us to that. As for MacIvor Fraser, his confession ruined him; of course it is believed by some people, and yet by few of those who served in India. You see, Bagley, at any rate, didn't give it much credit."

So the story was told to young Jim Willing of the Belaland police that night when the expedition started for Gilmer's Krall; not phrased exactly as I have put it here, but forcibly, with a certain belief that it was unbelievable that Fraser of Glencoe ever could have sent that order.

Little Jim Willing thought it all over as they swung that night over the dusky plain under the dim stars—never so many as in the sky which the Southern Cross dominates. The two Bela boys ran ahead by the

ponies; the twenty chattered, and hummed very low a music-hall air, popular in London ten years before. The smells of the open reached across and held the troop's tired sense; the little Cape ponies plodded on desperately. Bird cries, once or twice a lion's, mingled with the clatter of horses and the low murmur of voices. At the head rode Fraser of Glencoe, a tall, mighty shadow of a man, who had brought that band, as he had Bagley, back in Riminjie, to feel his force of executive and will; who in his presence, in that time of danger, of empire building, forgot the story of Barkur was against him; only feeling that it might have happened to anyone when mere physical anguish might have taken away the power of sense, and so of will. Or had not MacDonald perhaps lied? But whatever the case, these adventurers of the Belaland police were following the leader Bagley had chosen. They were there to save the North of Belaland for the Company, for the Empire. These twenty, in some sense, had on their shoulders the burden of England.

And while they rode on over the darkened veldt, Hennessy was hurrying forward from Cloutsie with nine hundred men. A messenger had borne on the news of the Bela revolt. People were reading it, and discussing it in London, and as to how it would affect shares, and as to what the already famous firm of Barnato Brothers thought of it. Dr. Jameson was stirring Mashonaland. The lights in the clubs and hotels of Cloutsie, Johannesburg, and Kimberly, and Cape Town, and Durban were burning brightly. Something was wrong with the Belaland Company. Surely Riminjie and Gilmer's would be cut off. In a day, perhaps, all that territory with all its significance would be lost as the Transvaal was, and Halton, the administrator, was already at Cloutsie. In New York they read, "Another one of England's little wars."

The man riding at the head of the tired and now silent little company on the Belaland veldt was thinking, with a sudden exultation:

"Here is my chance to make the name of Fraser again."

What a curious life his had been! On how many ventures had his nature carried him! His past arranged itself in a series of vivid pictures, and they seemed to go backward, instead of to begin at their beginning. He heard garrison talk, and chatter and gossip, and scandal; he remembered a day in the mess, after a polo match, and he was just back from his Afghan achievement.

And then something more passed; London this time, the talk of a Mayfair house. And then, still farther back, and he was Fraser of Magdalen. (He was afterward of the Varsity Eight.) One day on the river, in a practice pull, he went to pieces; he fainted; and when he came to he was lying on the turf looking up into the blue Oxfordshire sky. And suddenly somebody looked down at him; a girl's dark face framed by carelessly brushed black hair. He never forgot her face and eyes. In some way, they were like his mother's. God be thanked, that

mother had not lived to know his disgrace, and the Fraser of Glencoe before him had died in India when he was a little lad. But that girl's face—his companions had poked fun at him; there wasn't any girl at all.

"Bah, woman!" he muttered now, remembering certain garrison women he had known. And she, the girl his vision had presented, the face he strangely remembered so long, there in the lonely veldt, where was she, what was she to him, wherever she might be?

And then he remembered how the restless wish for activity had brought him, the disgraced, to South Africa; how he had sunken and sunken, and how the good open life had restored him to himself; and the chance had been presented.

Instantly Fraser of Glencoe's thoughts went back to Gilmer's. How well these men rode! What a variety of hardy fellows they were; from the two western cowboy scouts down to fresh-faced little Willing, along the lines of their different natures! And all now

were under the Company's flag; no, under the Union Jack, as he himself was again.

"Lieutenant Willing," Fraser said, turning in his saddle, "I take it this Pierson at Gilmer's is an efficient officer?"

"So considered," Willing said, pulling up to his side, "the general opinion. He is a nephew of Mr. Halton of the Company, like myself."

"Halton, Halton," said Fraser, recalling the name.

"He has more to do with the Belaland than any other man, I believe. I dare say he's at Cloutsie this moment, if he has heard of this rumpus."

"Yes, probably," Fraser said, as if understanding all about Halton. "By the way, I intend to make a drive through them, if they are there, into Gilmer's. That's all."

"That's all," repeated the subaltern, as if it were as easy as riding a Cape pony.

"I expect they may be about there already in some force. Who knows how many may be watching and listening, as only they

can? I fear our twenty won't get in there, not all," the leader went on, speaking out his trouble.

"They are as good a twenty as I have ever known; not weedy, you know," said the subaltern.

As they talked, the dawn stretched, strange, weird, across the veldt; to little Willing it was as if he were in the dreariness of an utterly lonely primeval chaos. Suddenly the sun seemed to catch the green slope tops, and the distances blazed with colours that sank away into shining green and scarlet and yellow and green again.

"A sunrise of Belaland," Willing said, wearily, for something to say.

But Fraser was silent.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAREER OF FRASER OF GLENCOE.

WILLING fell behind into the company of a tall, wiry, thin, nervous man, Simpson, who rode in stillness for some time, and then said:

"That's Fraser?"

"Yes, you know by this time."

"That Barkur affair was about a woman."

"About a woman," said little Willing, turning toward him a fresh charming face, flushed in that Belaland dawn. "You served in India then?"

"Yes, I know him, if he doesn't me. I think he will later."

"Yes, yes, later," said Willing, interested—"later. We have this thing in hand."

"It isn't as if you were about the club at Durban, eh—or Cape Town," Simpson

went on, almost sneeringly. "But he—Fraser of Glencoe—he's a man to lead."

"A woman," said little Willing, remembering a girl who might or might not be at Cloutsie. But he had the attitude of most young bachelors of the world—the approved tone on that subject—"a woman, you say. Well, Simpson?"

"It's this. He and MacDonald liked the same girl. MacDonald got her. I believe he said what he did to shield MacDonald. If I didn't think so, I shouldn't be here."

"That was it then," Willing said with an odd note in his voice. "I have seen Zulu women in Natal——"

"Bearing the load, while the men went up the hill in the sunshine, a stick or an assegai in their hands. But there are other men"—he paused—"men like Fraser of Glencoe. I have served with him before."

"Where?"

"On the Indian border," said the man.

"And the woman?" little Willing went

on, thinking of that girl in Cloutsie; "what of her?"

"She married MacDonald, I tell you—one of the prettiest women in India. She's dead now, I think. I know Fraser; he reasoned: I am alone; there's the woman—why shouldn't I say, 'I don't know'—to shield her?"

For a moment Willing rode silent, looking at the big figure of the leader outlined against a green slope.

"If that be so——?" he began.

"He's a man to follow," the trooper said simply, turning his dark, thin face to Willing.

"Then perhaps it was to save the woman trouble that he said that he might have done it—in his delirium—knowing indeed he never did."

"Yes, yes," said Simpson with few words.

An hour afterward they paused for breakfast; and the broad veldt lay in its rolling slopes beyond under the now strong sun; but not a sign of life appeared there. It was as still, as quiet, as the primeval chaos Willing

had crudely compared it to in the night ride —far reaching, limitless—yet perhaps some day to teem with a great population. The boy fell to thinking of this over his muddy black coffee, as men think of possibilities in South Africa—yes, the probabilities of a new land; here are certain great ones who have done things, why should not I; here is the record of what Kimberly and Johannesburg have done for certain men, perhaps no cleverer, no braver than I. And then the boy's thoughts turned to the girl, who might or might not be at Cloutsie; perhaps she was at D'Urban, or Cape Town; perhaps on her way to, or in, England. There were other men—in the contest—so far as that girl was concerned. But a woman—a woman's influence on a man? What had been said of Fraser by Simpson—himself a strange, mysterious person with a past—had influenced Willing's thoughts; his fair, curly head was sunken back into the long, tangled grass. He had lived long in garrisons in his career; in South African clubs; a little in London; and un-

consciously had taken on the tone of older disillusionized men. And had Fraser done that? He edged nearer the thin, efficient Simpson, who was a morose individual.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"I am of a decent family," said the other. "Why are the others here?"

"I am among the Belas out of adventure —I think—against the wishes of my family."

"Your father is Willing of the Company?"

"Yes, you know, of course," the boy said, without any particular show of pride. "Yes."

"Well, he made it out here. Why does he let you serve—as you are?"

"I fancy he thinks it will do me good—the service—make a man of me. He has every confidence in Bagley."

"And yet Bagley let you come here?"

"Well, I would."

The other looked at the boy for a moment. "You take after the first syllable of your name—will; it's written on your face, I see. Well, why am I here? The land, the chance.

I was a prospector; I trekked over this plain. I know it all—or some of it—some that others don't. Then, getting broke, I enlisted in the police, and because, like Fraser of Glencoe, I had known service, they took me in. As for Fraser, I wonder why he doesn't remember me. I was with him there."

"You mean—not at Barkur."

"No, no—but at Trucknow. Yet——"

Fraser was coming over the hillocks; his gait briskly alert, as it always was; he was one of those men who never lounged. His gray eyes were on Simpson.

"You know the veldt, Simpson?"

"Of course I know it, sir—three years of it. You remember me."

"I can't forget so good a sergeant as you were, man. Now you will take the Bela boys, with the Arizonian, Kimball, and Ferguson. We are near Gilmer's." He paused.

"I knew you from the first; but you did not seem to recognise me," the trooper said, looking hard at Fraser.

"I did, from the first, and I remembered,"

the leader said simply. The other touched his cap, and went on to his duty.

How that approach to Gilmer's was managed is now a part of the history of Belaland. The greatest fortune so far had attended the twenty, and when the scouts saw over the slope the scattered Company houses with the little fort dominating it, and not a Bela in view—word was borne back to the others of the score who were sunken under the high grass of the veldt. But another came back on the heels of the first, stating that a great force had appeared over the farther slope, in all their war attire. Then Fraser of Glencoe did a thing which would have been branded the height of foolhardiness had it failed. We may say that the South African negro is inferior to the white man—by twenty to one; but there were thousands of them against Fraser. What he did that day was the beginning of what characterized his subsequent course in South Africa. From their position —which had been unobserved, by no shrewdness on the part of the English, but by a

strange carelessness on King Gula's—the twenty, or rather the sixteen—the others being the scouts—were ordered to mount. The rested ponies shook their shaggy little manes, and tore up and over the hillock hiding the enemy.

The plain below was nearly thronged with black warriors. But Fraser's band, with a shrill cry, bore on; no man of that strangely assorted company hesitated; no man doubted the leader who had been branded in India with a disgrace almost heinous.

The Belas looked about in the sheerest surprise, and the little troop was almost halfway across the broad stretch of plain before they turned down on them. Then they pulled closer together, while the bullets whizzed. Gula had secured excellent guns and ammunition for his men. Every now and then they would fire as well as they could from their careering ponies. The men in the little stone fort, who had, of course, noticed the reinforcement, began firing, comprehending the situation.

Willing saw a man of theirs fall, to be picked up and thrown over Simpson's saddle-bow; then they tore on toward the fort; and when they were under the shadow of the walls, the men above were thundering down their reply, and most of them were inside.

Yet it was evident that only Fraser's effrontery had won; he had counted on the natives' respect for English daring; he had seen that this little dash of his twenty would persuade them that the invincible power of the Great White Queen would follow with farther forces—to push them back across the Zambesi and beyond it. Yet now, as the gates slammed behind the last man, he turned, without, as Willing noticed, any exultation showing on his face, which was perhaps just a bit flushed from the heat of the action.

"How many are left?" he asked.

"Three—out there—three," came Willing's voice. "That was a brave thing, Simpson."

Simpson was depositing his burden, the wounded man, on the ground.

"You did nothing better than that in India," Fraser was saying. "A doctor here."

"Yes, directly," said a little, wiry, dark man, his hand in a sling. "You command then from Riminjie."

"Yes, from Major Bagley—who had your message, as you see. I am Fraser, private in the police."

"Private," said Pierson doubtfully, for this little man was he. "You did that well—a bit too daringly perhaps. I shouldn't have dared. Your name, sir."

"Fraser. They are yelling from below; we'd better look after them."

By this time the square of stockade was crowded with its denizens—the miners from the nearby works; a few blacks; some prospectors who had rushed in hurriedly from the veldt; some soldiers of the Company off duty that moment—looking wonderingly at the succour that had rushed in on them as if from the skies. A cheer which they had raised when they first saw the addition dashing on

to almost certain death now burst out even stronger. A red-faced Irishwoman, the wife of one of the storekeepers, was sobbing hysterically. Willing was helping Simpson and the post surgeon with the wounded man. Fraser, rubbing a red hand through his red Scotch mane, was talking hurriedly to Pierson.

"What caused it?"

"We don't know. Ten Belas broke away three days ago, after killing an overseer. The next day a prospector came in, saying that seven trekking from Salisbury had been killed, and that the whole nation seemed aroused; Belas in war paint everywhere. I didn't want to abandon this place—couldn't, for the Company's sake."

"No, you couldn't," Fraser said; "that was Major Bagley's decision; he couldn't have reached another."

"So," Pierson went on, "I sent the messenger down to Riminjie. I should have sent down the women and children, too, but I didn't dare; you know I couldn't spare the

guard, without which I didn't dare trust 'em on the veldt."

"At Riminjie we have heard, too, that they were out in the South. Major Bagley has sent down to Cloutsie."

"Hennessy will be up then," the commandant of Gilmer's said, "and perhaps some of the Company. They'll have to be taught."

"Humph, yes," Fraser said. "I am thinking of these people. I don't know them so well as I might."

"You did exactly right," Pierson said, scanning the tall Scot closely.

"You don't suppose Gula himself—is out there? I fancy not—or there would be a strong force—wouldn't there? He's quite a remarkable person—this Gula, isn't he?—an intelligent man."

"Belaland is so new; they had the same problem among the Basutas, and the Zulus," Pierson commented.

"But this one isn't so hard," said Fraser, confidently, "for the force of the former example. I think that Gula, if he hasn't been

belied by reports, is too intelligent to have done this without encouragement from somewhere."

"The Germans, the Boers—the Portuguese," cried Pierson excitedly. "You mean you surmise——"

"I propose to know," the other said.

Pierson wondered who this man was who, with the calm air of power, or authority, proposed to know. Was he some new force from the Company—perhaps from the Government? He was a daring fellow certainly; that he had demonstrated; he had raised hope in Gilmer's; he had dismayed the Belas, making them a little less self-confident by showing what an Englishman dared to do.

"You know Mr. Willing," Fraser said, "my superior officer."

"Not on this occasion—Captain Fraser," said little Willing, as he came up. "The doctor says Dunham will die."

"The fourth then—better than the other three—out there," Fraser said. Willing wondered if he were thinking of those hun-

dreds who had been killed in the tragedy at Barkur—the Tommy Atkins who never would come home again.

"Simpson, under some circumstances, would have won the Victoria Cross for nothing more deserving. The way he jumped down—and held the pony—and lifted Dunham up! It was a neat trick. You wouldn't expect a man so lean could have done it. But he did it. I saw him do something as good —once in the Soudan."

"You were there?" Pierson asked, "in the service; but I can see that."

"Yes," said Fraser laconically, with that air of defiance he took on in reference to his past, "I am that Fraser of the Seventieth Bengal you may have heard of."

Pierson hemmed, and stammered, and ended by saying nothing apologetic at all; only wondered how the deuce Bagley had intrusted that man with this mission—"Fraser of Barkur."

But Fraser was now looking out over the stretching country. The enemy seemed to

have paused; their dark scurrying figures hung back in the tangle. He had heard that Gula was almost as good a warrior as Cetewayo had been in Zululand, as Lobengula among the Matabeles. He was thinking; he was fancying many things. If the Company should be driven back, Belaland would fall into dispute again; only the right of possession held it now—nothing more. And it meant—why twelve by seven hundred miles of territory—a nation in itself. The thought stirred his blood; the gray eyes flashed, unseen by anyone. Bagley, God bless him, had given him a chance; and he had done fairly well by it—so far; so far, why he had indeed but begun it, and, they might think, begun it badly. He didn't care now; he would make them think; yes, he would make them think indeed. Energy, purpose—the spirit of the man of action stirred within him.

One must not suppose while these things are being described that matters were quiet in Gilmer's Krall; all was the intensest activity; the defenders were ever on the alert

—against the now silent but treacherous foe. Gilmer's Krall stood a single point representing the Company with miles of perilous veldt behind.

Pierson talked aside with Willing, the subaltern, at Riminjie. Presently he sought out Fraser.

"You have been stationing your men."

"Yes," said Fraser; "they're a good lot —particularly Simpson."

"I want to ask your advice," said Pierson.

Bagley had not been mistaken in the man he had sent from Riminjie; he was still the man who had done things in India; but perhaps Bagley had not counted, in those few moments he had had for decision, that Fraser was always likely to be the leader rather than the led. Other men in South Africa were to find that out.

"I was just about to offer a suggestion," said Fraser.

The suggestion was good, and was adopted; and from that moment Fraser of Glen-

coe commanded at Gilmer's, so Willing afterward declared; because his suggestions were always wiser than Pierson's ideas, which Pierson was wise enough to acknowledge.

Gula, King of the Belas, defeated in battle, had been many days broken-spirited in his palace, remembering that a few months before he had had ten thousand warriors at beck and call.

And as he sat there, one came to him, and prostrating himself low, as was proper before a mighty king, said: "The Ambassador of the Great White Queen."

As Gula, the King, an hour after, was meditating many things, there entered to him a man, tall and strong and red-haired, as if the sun were caught in his locks; and the King said through the interpreter: "Are you he, who did all this?" And Fraser said, "I bring you a plan, O mighty King of the Belas"—for so it was translated to the King—"and through it you will be even a mightier King."

And what that plan was, do not the white

man's histories of that time and period show? It is a long story, a significant story—a record of British Empire.

But as to the man who accomplished all these things, his is the story; a new rendering of an old story, which I have before me.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THREE YEARS AFTER I CAME TO CLOUTSIE.

THREE years after these events in North Belaland, I, John Barton, an American, was in Cloutsie, having reached there by the way of India. I had been about South Africa more or less, enjoying the hospitality of their clubs, which are of the colonial best; and now one day I heard from this very Jim Willing the events which I have presented as the opening chapters of this narrative: MacIvor Fraser of Glencoe was a great name; Fraser of Barkur was forgotten; MacIvor Fraser of Glencoe had saved North Belaland, and made it an integral part of the Empire; Fraser had won over Gula; Fraser had turned the wild Belas, by inherent genius for organization, into one of those great native

forces that in time of war England can count on; Fraser was not only close in the counsels of the Belaland Company, but in those of the great Cecil Rhodes himself. All this, mind you, within a year. Yet they did not count it particularly wonderful down there, where Rhodes had established himself in a period not so much longer.

All this was told me by Willing as one hot day we sat in the Cloutsie Club over whiskeys and sodas. I already knew most of it, but I had not had it first hand before; and it's from Willing's version that I have been enabled to state how Bagley saw in Fraser the possibility in that crisis. What Willing told me further was that when Hennessy with the forces reached Gilmer's, after having fought a battle near Riminjie, he found that region almost without fear. When, hearing the story of Fraser's appearance at Gilmer's Krall, he asked for him, he heard he had gone on to see Gula himself with Frear, a great hunter of elephants and lions, a person in Belaland something like

the famous Mr. Selous. Hennessy wondered, Willing said; but when shortly Fraser returned with the chief himself, who was prepared to fight the White Queen no longer, who had listened to the proposition to turn his warriors into police for the Company, then Hennessy listened to Fraser of Glencoe as Pierson had; and when it was reported to Halton, Halton had sent for him. Here Fraser conquered again. And now, as I listened to little Willing, all Belaland was well policed. Prospectors already were scattering over that rich region. The mines at Gilmer's had been further developed. Cloutsie itself had been made into quite a marvellous spot, with some fine houses, with Bela police officers, with good-natured Belas to carry you swiftly in jinrickshas, with an admirable municipal government, with, I believe, after the club at D'Urban in Natal, one of the best South African clubs, with its polo, and all the incidents of life attendant on the British colonial, who carries his habits wherever he goes, threatening, between himself

and the home-Briton and the American, to reduce the whole world to a dull uniformity of British habit and observance. Still you must remember, with all these urbanities, Cloutsie is still a border town; the Boers trek in there; rough adventurers make it a centre for their operations up country. Its exchanges afford all the gambling excitement of Kimberly. And Indian coolies have collected there, as they did in Natal.

As little Willing told me this story in the Cloutsie Club, I said:

"So it is the same man—Fraser of Glencoe. What do they say now to his Indian reputation?"

"They say—it was MacDonald. He came down here to retrieve himself, and he evidently has. I like him," said Willing.

"For a woman, eh? You know MacDonald married the woman Fraser was interested in."

"Yes, that's the story."

"Now, let me tell you," said I. "I know

something of the matter myself; I knew Fraser at Oxford."

"Tell me," said little Willing eagerly.

"Well, you see, when I had my degree at Harvard, my father would have me take some time at Oxford. I fell into the boating set; I met a big Scotchman—Fraser of Glencoe. I knew the name, it was a historical one, you know, and he attracted me. He was intended for the law then, I believe; but he would go into the army. They couldn't deny what he had in the blood. But as for my memory—it is of those days at Magdalen; that big, red-haired Scot was one of the liveliest and best fellows in the world. And we were a lively enough set. Oh, I wish I could tell you the fun we had; everything seems a bit stale since then—everything has lost its flavour."

"You rich Americans—who do nothing in particular!" said Willing, smiling at me in his bright, boyish way. "All the engineers—that is, the most o' 'em down here—are Americans. You know Lindsay, of course."

"Why, Lindsay is my cousin," I said. "That's one reason I am put up at this club. But to return to the story. Fraser's rise in South Africa has been particularly interesting to me on account of those old memories, though I haven't seen him since. I knew the woman, too—one of those entertaining girls, who haven't much feeling, I think, but she attracted Fraser. He was a man for one woman—different from most of us then and since. Perhaps she was flattered by him; she was a poor girl, a curate's daughter, with all the ambition in the world. They became engaged, and then MacDonald came along—in the Indian service before Fraser, you know. And MacDonald was by some deaths near the great MacDonald fortune; and she, or her mother made her do it, threw Fraser over. He was not a man to cry after a woman who belonged to another. Then he went into the service and did those things which distinguished him. But who would have supposed that he would be the man—the fellow I knew then—to add Belaland to

the Empire? However, to return to my story. He met the MacDonalds down there; she had her babies and her interests; and though she may have wished to see whether her old lover may have had some of the old sentiment left, she was a good woman; she didn't experiment very much; one of those women, you know, who settle down to any husband—I say, not a woman perhaps of very much feeling, but of simple, direct devotion to the man she had given herself to."

"Good God! What a mess men make of it, in their interest in women! Think of Fraser—a great, strong man, worthy almost of a princess of the blood," little Willing cried, in his pessimistic, young way.

"They usually make a mess of it when they let 'em alone," said I, more wisely, for I had been too long a bachelor, and had known too many lonely moments not to know that most of my married friends are happier than I. "But," I went on, "we who knew Fraser in the old days said of him, that when that situation at Barkur was presented to

him he said to himself: 'Why, here am I alone, with scarce a relative, and here is MacDonald, who has a wife and three children. Can I blight the life of that woman?' And besides, he knew the horror of the torture he had been through. He knew MacDonald's temptation, and MacDonald has been, you know, a physical wreck ever since. So he said he might have signed the order. Now that's a complicated situation. And there's another reason: perhaps he really didn't know but that he had signed it."

"In the first case," said Willing, thinking of his friend and hero, "how could MacDonald have let him do it? What a cad that makes MacDonald!"

"It does and it doesn't. Fraser's superior will would have made him keep silent about it; and then his family—his own selfishness. But, whatever the course is, Fraser has lived it down. The odium has come to MacDonald's door."

"Well, well!" said Willing. "I suppose the mystery of it will never be solved. It's

funny how much interest the women have in it. Now there is my cousin Maisie Halton—little girl, only nineteen; and she makes him a bigger hero, just because there's a woman in the case. Ah, Mr. Barton, do you know Mr. Tirwin?" and Willing carelessly introduced us.

I did know who Tirwin was. Who, in South Africa, didn't at that time?—one of the great millionaires who had been "frozen out" by Rhodes and others in the Chartered Company, and who had turned his attention to Belaland. I now saw in this wonderful person—quite as wonderful in the traditions of his past as Mr. Barnato himself—I saw a tall, sallow, thin-faced young man, with sunken black eyes, a hook nose over a retreating chin; he looked perhaps a Spanish Jew; as a matter of fact, he was a Portuguese. Behind him, fanning himself with a big fan, was a short, florid, blue-eyed Englishman—Halton himself. I proceeded to take a decided dislike to Tirwin, who had come to South Africa from somewhere—

Heaven knew where; he was said to have been a penniless waiter, and now his fortune, as such estimates are made, was said to be something like fifty million pounds. But at one time Mr. Barnato was said to be worth a hundred millions. Our fancy likes to enlarge on the possibilities of millionaires. I, who have three hundred thousand dollars so invested that I can travel around a bit, being a bachelor, have never been dazzled by these tremendous fortunes.

At that moment my cousin, Bob Lindsay, who commands a great salary as a mining expert, came up with some others, asking, "What is to be done about Nitara?" Now I have not stated what everybody knows now —the name since has become like Golconda —that Nitara adjoins East Belaland; that its territory, about three hundred square miles, was in dispute between the Boers, the Portuguese, and the English. The Boers, however, had it policed. That day at Cloutsie excitement was at fever heat. The discoveries promised incalculable wealth. All South

Africa was in an indescribable ferment. Men talked about it with bated breath. And the Boers held it still. What was to be done? It seemed as if this ought to belong to the Belaland Company as much as the Transvaal ought to the Chartered Company. In the Transvaal a Boer minority governed an English majority—a minority that didn't know how to govern, in the English sense. And here were English traders, English capitalists, already filling Nitara. Could the Company—could England—refuse them a reasonable support? The feeling ran in Cloutsie, Belaland, much as it ran regarding the Transvaal before Dr. Jameson's raid. What would have happened if that raid had succeeded? The circumstances I have to relate of Belaland during my visit may shed some light on that other affair.

While this talk ran on the great Tirwin kept up a low conversation with Halton. I watched his sleepy, non-committal eyes; his thin, bent figure; his lined face. Yet, as I believe I have said, he was reputed to be no

more than thirty. A second great man here appeared—Berner, another Belaland millionaire, a shrewd, keen-faced man, who nodded coldly to Tirwin. I was observing these men. As Tirwin and Halton went outside into the street, a jinricksha with one of those strong, laughing, good-natured Belas in the shafts rattled by, bearing an extremely pretty girl, to whom Tirwin bowed.

"Who is she?" I asked Willing.

"Oh, don't you know? My cousin, Maisie Halton. You'll meet her this afternoon at the polo grounds."

That week was a great occasion in Cloutsie. Fraser was expected to consult with some of the officials of the Company on various important matters—the most important, perhaps, the situation in Nitara. There were to be several personages representing the Chartered Company; possibly even Mr. Rhodes; and certainly Sir William Trent for the Government. Even now the wires were ticking—as they do forever in Downing Street—"Nitara—Nitara. Settle it in

some way; something must be done. The Boers can't keep order."

At Cloutsie it was altogether a festive occasion; there never had been gathered so many important persons since the beginning of the little capital. In the evening there was to be a dinner to Fraser, and there would be many speeches.

That afternoon I went over to the polo field as Willing had suggested. It seemed quite a gala affair, the ladies forming the society of Cloutsie, at the edge of the field —an animated, chattering lot; the colonial and garrison style of women that obtain in so many parts of the British Empire. I met Mrs. Colonel Bagley—the major had been promoted; and presently Willing came clattering over and presented Miss Maisie Halton. I saw at once I had been right in thinking her immensely pretty when I had glimpsed her in the jinricksha.

"Oh, I say, I told Jim to present you at once, Mr. Barton," she said. "Ah, how do you like it in Belaland? I really don't know

much about it myself. I am only from England three months; and I came up to Cloutsie at once. By the way, Mr. Lindsay says you may go with us up to Nitara. Have you trekked? It will be an experience. You didn't know about it? Well, papa, Mr. Lindsay, and Mr. Fraser, I suppose—possibly Mr. Berner—are going up there this week. You must come along, I declare. Yes, you must, you know. By the way, my cousin, Jim Willing, says you know all about Mr. Fraser. Do tell me about him—please. What is he like? Of course, I know a lot about him—yes, indeed, a lot; but he never has been south of Riminjie—now a big town, too—since he began his career in Belaland."

You must not think that Maisie Halton chattered on in that way exactly; I simply put down the general run of her remarks. I was becoming so interested that I didn't like it particularly when that fellow Tirwin came up, and proceeded to monopolize her. I wondered if Halton might not be tempted by the

thought of marrying his daughter to this reputed possessor of fifty millions sterling.

Presently there was a stir across the field, and I saw Halton, and Sir William Trent, with my old acquaintance Fraser, who came toward us calm and strong; his keen gray eyes taking in everything; and he instantly recognised me.

"Why, Barton—Jack Barton," he said; "I have something to tell you. Do come around to my lodgings—at Mrs. Bagley's."

Then his eyes fell on Maisie Halton, and hers on him. I never have seen two people so look at each other on first acquaintance. Was it that they had met somewhere before, I asked myself. But instantly his face assumed its usual self-control. Miss Halton's voice, however, was very low, as she said:

"We know all about you, Mr. Fraser."

Then Tirwin was presented to the man who at that moment was the principal military officer of the Belaland Company. The big Scot acknowledged the Portuguese's attention with the slightest nod.

I dare say the polo was admirably played; Willing said afterward that it was "a rattling match." But everybody there had their eyes for the important persons—particularly for Fraser, who, as I say, just looked quiet and strong, in his way. I noticed he had a considerable talk with Maisie Halton. I wondered what it could have been about.

"My husband—the colonel—is much attached to Mr. Fraser," said Mrs. Bagley, a vivacious little woman.

"I believe he discovered him, didn't he?" I said.

"The colonel understands men very well," said the little woman, which made me think again, as a bachelor will, that there may be a good deal in matrimony.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROBLEM OF NITARA.

I DID not see Fraser, as he had predicted; not until after the dinner, where he was cheered vociferously; where I understood at once how completely his reputation had been restored. He referred to this himself, saying rather feelingly that Africa would ever be for him, as for many others, the land of promise, of hope, of achievement. He went over very modestly—for a man who had done so much—with his successes among the Belas, now as well trained, as loyal as any native police in any colony. And this brought him to the subject, which everybody was expecting—Nitara. For he offered again that inevitable contrast—of the blacks under the Boers, and under the English. Here was Belaland with a population of six hundred

thousand negroes to a hundred thousand whites. Yet, to-day nowhere was the white man safer from the molestation of the blacks, and the blacks—from King Gula down—never had been so happy. He had no patience with those who were continually asserting English abuse of negroes. There were abuses, to be sure; how could they be avoided? But were they so great as those the American Indian had suffered? Let members of Parliament—and story-tellers—talk as they would, he failed to understand how matters could be much bettered. But—and he pointed to the east—there were the Boers; there not only negroes, but thousands of Englishmen—who were in the majority, who paid the taxes—were badly treated by an inefficient, because a bigoted, government. Freely, he was entirely in accord with what Dr. Jameson had tried to do there; nor did he blame Mr. Rhodes—or Mr. Chamberlain—rather held them up as the most loyal of her Majesty's subjects, if they had abetted the raid. This brought him to Nitara——

Here the frequent applause became uproarious; there was no mistaking the sympathies of that audience.

"Nitara," Fraser went on with slow deliberativeness, "where there are to-day ten thousand English prospectors—with a thousand Boers against them; Nitara which belongs to us by right of our agreement with the Portuguese—and the original owner of that territory, that present loyal British subject, Gula, King of the Belas. I arraign the ministry as inefficient; the Premier as incompetent for not having defined our position there. I believe in the very premises—on any basis of international law—that the Boer occupation is untenable. It means monopolies—and concessions—against the public interest—in perhaps what my friend Mr. Lindsay will tell you is to-day one of the richest pieces of land in the world. And I am prepared to say, that I know now——"

He looked about, and his eyes rested for a moment, it seemed to me at least, on Tirwin—the mighty Tirwin.

"That I know now that a man, strong in South Africa, has arranged with both the Boers and the Portuguese to secure all the Nitara concessions for himself—or what is practically his individual company. I am prepared to say—whoever this individual—that intrigue of delay in the very seat of government itself has been undertaken by this individual interest."

Hisses and cries arose at this, with cheers for Fraser.

"It's shameful, that Nitara is not ours; it's shameful that the Government will not send its own troops there, or empower the great company of which I am an employee to cross that border. I have spoken as the man of action, not as the politician. And I am aware that action does not always have favour in boards and governments. But I am sure my policy is England's policy—the Imperial policy—which protects the oppressed with the strong hand—which has followed the British trader wherever he has ventured."

That was all; but it seemed to me enough.

That room fairly rang. The words of this speech were to reach from far-away Cloutsie, throughout all the British world, to the four corners of the earth. It was a significant speech. Yet how significant? Did it outline the Belaland Company's or the Government's policy—or both? Were these policies antagonistic? Or had this strange, strong leader who had risen in Belaland spoken for himself—without authority? Little information on these points could be gained from what was said by Sir William Trent, who represented the Government; who had come here to confer with Fraser, Hennessy, Berner, Halton, and Tirwin. Sir William spoke in the mild, non-committal manner of him whose words are intended to convey no definite idea. Nor did Mr. Berner's very able speech seem to convey much; he indeed confined himself mostly to speaking of the resources of Belaland, which in three years had grown from a population of twenty thousand whites to its present hundred thousand; and he roundly praised Mr. Halton and Mr. Fraser (for Fra-

ser had no equal as an organizer, he stated) for this result—obtained in the marvellous period of three years.

He said non-committally that of course the Government probably would protect British interests in Nitara. There were no speeches at once after these; they had put all—including us Americans—to thinking.

Then I recollected that in a crowd of ladies listening at the door I had seen Maisie Halton's rapt, earnest face; but we all perhaps had sat in as rapt attention to Fraser's speech, the speech of the man of important action.

"That was Miss Halton," said I to Lindsay—my seat adjoining his—"yes, they're all there. She told me this afternoon that she and Mrs. Bagley were going with Halton, Fraser, and you, into Nitara. Isn't it dangerous?" I added.

"Why, every foot of Belaland and Nitara is as safe for a woman to travel in as New York. You are coming along, too. But you are mistaken about Fraser. He remains

at Riminjie—I believe. His duty won't permit him to go now. But you'll enjoy it. Trekking is rather rough, yet you've had some of it already."

"Yes, yes," I said, "I'd like to go."

"And we'll get you a lion or so, and you'll see old Tom Winter, up there—in the mines—hard at it."

"Tirwin goes, too, doesn't he?"

"Oh, yes, he goes along—in state, I suppose. Fraser hit him up a bit, didn't he?"

"I thought he was the man."

"It might be he; it might be another," Lindsay said.

"But Fraser has made a powerful enemy."

"He may have had him before. It is, as he declared so openly, a game between the Company and Tirwin. The plausibility is that Tirwin has run against the chief interest in Kimberly—and, they say, lost heavily. You see, if he or a company could keep the Boers there, or get the Portuguese there, and obtain the Nitara concession from either of

them—they would be the strong hand down here. Tirwin, you know, while a British subject, is a Portuguese by birth. What does he care particularly for English interest—as compared with Tirwin's?"

I lodged at the Cloutsie Club, where for a long time were little groups discussing matters and indulging in some rather strong talk so far as the subject of Nitara was concerned. At last, when I turned in, I was by my window for some time considering the situation, when an Indian servant appeared (the Cloutsie Club, like that at D'Urban, has these suave, almost perfectly-trained or instinctively well-mannered Orientals). He announced—but Fraser pushed past him.

"I told you I wanted to see you, Jack; I didn't have time before."

"Everybody knows you are the busiest man in Belaland," said I. "You must be used up, and it is mighty good of you to look me up. I had a long talk about you to-day with Willing—nice sort of a little chap."

"Yes, he is. He was with me when I

began down here. I think perhaps I may have lived that down," he added.

"Fraser," said I, "you always were a good friend of mine—before I knew much of anybody else in Oxford. Do you remember you were?"

"I think I can trust you on that account. For, really, on the old score—if you count it a score—I know you better than any other soul in Belaland."

"Yes, yes, MacIvor Fraser," said I; "and on that account I am bothered about you. Now that thing at Barkur—forgive me, please—you have lived that scandal down, as you say."

"MacDonald and I had to bear it about equally," he said. "Now perhaps he has to bear more of it——"

"Well, what I want to know, old man, is this—it's devilishly impertinent of me, I know—but they say you did that because of Flora Rivers—Mrs. MacDonald."

His face flushed, and in some passion, such as he rarely showed, he told me the

exact truth, which I am glad to be able to put down here:

"It's a lie, or a vain piece of the imagination. MacDonald knows no more about it than I. I told the exact truth: that suffering was horrible—fearful; they stretched the joints, you know. It threw me into a delirium. I can't say that I didn't sign the order when in that condition. MacDonald may have done it; but I declare I don't believe he did it consciously. He didn't go quite so far as I, and admit that he might have done it. That thing was terrible—terrible, I tell you; to think that I might have done that thing! I resigned from the service, from all my clubs, London and Indian, and then I came here to look up a chance. But at first the search seemed hopeless; and for the first and last time in my life I got to drinking too much. Then I enlisted in the Belaland police. You know the rest."

"That rest is a great deal, Mac," I said; "a great deal."

"It has only begun," he said, his eyes

flashing. "But what I want you to know is that it wasn't a woman—woman's silly talk made it so, I suppose. Novels are a curse; they make people—particularly women—have vain imaginings. There's enough fact in this world, and enough fiction in the shape of lies men tell about each other, without writing books of lies to amuse, it seems to me. Well, let that go—what I want you to know is that my liking for Flora MacDonald was a boy's calf-love, nothing more. When she took MacDonald I just stopped thinking about her. I no more would have said such a thing to save her husband than I would have told any other lie. But it was between my conscience and me to say frankly, 'In that fearful torture I may have done it. That's all I know about it.' But it's the past, Jack Barton—it can never bother me again," he added.

I listened in wonder, as he gave me this confidence; you couldn't doubt him; and I believe to-day that the mystery of Barkur will never have any solution.

"But, Jack, something strange happened to me to-day. Do you remember that day, twenty years ago, when I fainted on the river, and I woke up, and thought I saw a girl's face leaning over me, and really there was nobody there, and everybody poked fun at me about it? Well, I saw that face to-day."

"Miss Halton's," said I.

"What made you think that?"

"I fancied a look of recognition when you first saw her."

"Did I show it?" he said, as if provoked. "I dislike to show my feelings."

"Why, she couldn't have been born then," I said. "She can't be over nineteen now."

"It was her face. Look here, Jack. I never cared for women. I only made love once—and that once to Flora Rivers. I was over that quickly enough; but I know that they're gossiping about that still. But the other women I have let alone; the bad ones disgusted me, and none of the others ever

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interested me. Do you know why? Except that once in Flora Rivers's case, the face of that little girl I saw at Oxford stood between me and them. It is the same face, I declare; I knew every line of it—every colour of it. You think I am crazy, don't you? Yet I am counted down here a rather shrewd fellow."

"I do think you strange about it," I acknowledged; "but she looked at you in a queer way, too. It's queer, to say the least."

"It isn't queer at all," he said quietly. "She recognised me."

"Why, man, that was before she was born," I cried again; "pure absurdity. You've passed her on the street somewhere—perhaps met her."

"It's the same face I have had in my mind these twenty years—explain it as you will," he persisted doggedly. "I am here, Jack, by the way, because I am going away to-morrow."

"Lindsay told me you were not to be on the expedition to Nitara."

"I asked Miss Halton to-day not to go," he said.

"Why, Lindsay says there's no more danger than in Cloutsie itself."

"Now, Barton, I can trust you. I must, in this case. Perhaps you can manage it in some way. I have a notion, in short, that if we are to have Nitara, we must seize it, and hold it. Now, I have said that I could run enough of the Belaland police over there, with such men as Bagley and Pierson and Willing—who is true blue, despite Halton, who is involved: possession being nine-tenths, the Boers once ousted, we will hold it." His voice, which was now very low, showed his intense feeling. "'Who did it?" they may ask. Fraser, and the men follow Fraser. So the thing will be explained. The Government—the Company—will deprecate it. But it will be done, don't you see? We have it. If there's a long dispute, we are there under orders; we'll be the Government's, not the Company's, troops by that time, you see. Now

the danger is, the order may come any moment."

"The order, you say?"

"From certain high places."

"If you expect trouble, why don't you tell Halton not to let his daughter go."

"Halton must not so much as suspect it, because he stands in with Tirwin. Tirwin would upset everything in a second. In fact, to-day in Cloutsie but three persons know of this: myself, Sir William Trent, and Berner. We are waiting but to hear from London that the obstruction to the annexation of Nitara can't be overcome here. That may come any moment. That moment we shall sweep over the border."

"I should think your speech to-night would make them suspect," I said, after a moment.

"Why, don't you see, naturally they wouldn't suppose that we would show our hands. You agree, don't you? We are not such bad, nor, perhaps, such good diplomatists. But I asked Miss Halton to-day not

to go, just saying, 'It's too rough up there.' But she persisted she wanted to go; that she wanted to see a land so much talked about, and other women in Cloutsie had done it. Now, if you could help me a bit, Jack! I don't know a soul I could talk to about it, except you."

"Lindsay."

"Lindsay mustn't know of a word I have said to-night."

"Tirwin, then, is the man—or represents the men—who hope to secure Boer concessions so extensive that they wish the country to remain in Boer hands?"

"Yes, exactly. These men are secretly opposed to England," he said vehemently, "for what they consider their own personal profit."

"And how is Halton interested?" I asked.

"Simply because he has speculated—no crime, in South Africa; but he has lost, uniformly lost, and he is tremendously in Tirwin's debt. Halton is an able and experi-

enced man in the company's administration, a man for Tirwin to own."

"I understand," I said slowly. "I see that you expect your instruction to sweep over into Nitara may come any moment. Yet, to be sure, may not come for a year.

"It's curious that a man like you should take this trouble for a little girl you just have met," I added.

"We have known each other for twenty years," he persisted.

"And she was not born then?" I said, looking over his calm, strong face, and wondering at how this delusion could possess him. And then I remembered that men like him often have a vein of mysticism mingled with the strongest practicality. "I don't see what you can do."

"Perhaps I can do nothing; perhaps, too, nothing will happen. It was only my whim to tell you. I have talked more to you about my private matters than to any other person these eighteen years. You can try to persuade Mrs. Bagley about it. I don't dare.

Mrs. B. is a notorious gossip." His face grew graver. "I'm not in a position, with my past, to hurt a young girl by letting her name be coupled with mine."

"Oh, bosh!" said I, as lightly as I could, yet in some way quite serious myself. What an extraordinary situation, what a hallucination, indeed! But she seemed to remember him, too. Well, well, as I had told him, they must have seen each other somewhere; and no other fellow is quite so foolish as your seasoned bachelor; he's the man who commits the awful indiscretion of love at first sight. And this man was so strong, so sensible. But he had touched me with this perfect confidence of the old friendship existing after these long years.

Now, after some further words on other subjects—mostly reminiscences of men we had known—he said he was tired, and that he had the long ride to Riminjie before him at dawn.

And he left me very thoughtful: here

was your active, sensible man, with his delusions; and here was as pretty a kettle of fish as you could wish regarding Nitara, which even might involve a critical war.

CHAPTER V.

THE TREASON OF MAISIE HALTON.

I FOUND at breakfast that the guest of Cloutsie had departed close at dawn: there was always something to busy him in Belaland; he could not dawdle over receptions, even to himself. Sir William Trent and Mr. Berner, too, had gone on their way. Tirwin alone remained, preparing to accompany Halton on the excursion to Nitara.

Lindsay asked me if I were ready.

"You'll have the company of one of the world's great millionaires."

"A man I can't fancy," I commented.

"A young, shrewd, most successful person. Think, he's only thirty."

"I know, I know," I said; "but at fifteen his head was a half-century old. It

means nothing to me when I'm told Napoleon had conquered half of Europe in his youth."

"You're a philosopher, a trite one, I declare."

"But is it safe for the women?"

"You asked that before," he said, staring. "No, not the slightest danger. Besides, if I thought so, do you suppose I'd let Mrs. Lindsay go?"

I hardly knew how to go at Fraser's delicate commission. If Mrs. Lindsay were going, why not Maisie Halton? I was glad Mrs. Lindsay was; for this young lady is a jolly-good-fellow sort of a young married woman, who has followed her husband's fortune in various rough corners of the world. I certainly could get no sympathy from her in advising that the ladies should not be taken; I am afraid this athletic young woman would have put me down at once as a milksop. As for that army wife, I only succeeded in getting a fine critical stare. "Why, Colonel Bagley doesn't object." You know, that

seemed quite to settle the opposition; but I had two other strings to my bow. One was Halton himself, who, in his mild, suave way, said: "There's no earthly danger to anybody. Belaland, now that Fraser has made it so, is as safe as Surrey, and Nitara is well policed by the Boers." There did not seem the least expectation of the dash into Nitara Fraser had suggested. After the failure of the raid into the Transvaal, the whole matter probably appeared unimaginable; and I was bound not to so much as hint "a Fraser of Glencoe told me so!" The other string to my bow was Maisie Halton herself.

I found her snugly seated in a little drawing-room, and she came forward graciously to greet me. In the account I have made of our little talk together, I made her chatter—a slight schoolgirlish chatter. But now it seemed I was wrong; with the fine sweet innocence of girlhood, there was something more, leaving her serious and womanly. Her eyes were deeper, more meaning; her quiet girlish charm had increased almost to the

claim of absolute beauty; I certainly had been mistaken in my first opinion.

"You liked my friend Fraser?" said I. "You were anticipating meeting him, I remember you told me."

"We are already good friends," she said simply. "But we have known each other before."

I looked at her quickly. Was she sharing his dementia? and I asked bluntly—yet she did not appear to note the bluntness:

"May I ask, Miss Halton, where that was?"

"Yes, at Oxford, by the river."

"You remember that," I cried. "And you told me yesterday that you were only nineteen. Now, didn't you?"

She did not say, "A woman's age is a delicate subject, sir," but went on, in the most earnest way possible, her slim hands crossed over her knee, her pretty, serious face, that yet could laugh, leaning toward mine.

"I don't explain, I can't explain it; but I saw him then, and it wasn't the first time.

We have known each other a long, long time. It's all hazy and vague, but I know it; he knows it."

"You told each other all that, in the few moments yesterday, at the polo field?"

"We didn't have to tell it; we knew," she said, staring at me, as if I were strange so much as to doubt her.

Then I gave it up. It might be that the theory of affinities or love at first sight was being proven; it might be they had mesmerized each other. I failed to understand; I fail now. But such was the case, and I will leave a cleverer reasoner than I am to explain it.

"He said," she went on, "that in the old days you were the best fellow he knew."

I bowed my acknowledgment; I was getting a strange feeling about her, who, yet, looked only the English girl.

"If you believe him," I said, taking my cue, "I will tell you he does not wish you to go to Nitara, because——" Should I tell

her the reason? "Well, he thinks it better and safer not to."

"I know he feels that way. But I want to go, I will go."

"You wish to see this new Eldorado?"

"Yes, I want to go there. Mr. Fraser is wrong. Oh, don't mind, Mr. Barton, you've done all you can. You positively can't change me."

Her eyes sparkled like a girl anticipating her first dance; she was, after all, the "young girl," I said to myself.

"At least you and I have established a firm friendship."

"Why, yes, surely," said she. "Look, there's my cousin, Jim Willing." And she pointed out of the window at little Willing riding by a jinricksha that bore a very pretty girl; the Bela in the thills ran on with shining skin and beaming face; and Jim's face was scarce less smiling. "It's Edith Perkins, his *fiancée*," she said; "it's his last day; he's ordered to Gilmer's." Which made me think—Willing, as you know, being an

officer of the Company—of the secret Fraser had confided.

Well, Maisie Halton's and my friendship was firmly established from that moment; it perhaps might have been something more on my part, had it not been for Fraser: she was such a jolly little girl, as I say, despite that rather uncanny delusion she and Fraser seemed to share together.

So, the situation plainly being beyond my moving it, I accepted the inevitable, certain, on Miss Halton's own words, that I had done all I possibly could to keep her back from Nitara. I saw, indeed, a deal of her, until Mrs. Lindsay mildly twitted me about her; and I noticed our great Mr. Tirwin hardly seemed to like me, which for the first time aroused my suspicion that he might have some personal interest in Maisie Halton.

I do not suppose it was discreet for me to have excited Tirwin's antipathy, a man so powerful in South Africa, who had following him constantly a crowd of sycophants and flatterers, though I don't believe any one ever

successfully flattered him. In Cloutsie, in the club and elsewhere, this person with absolutely a mysterious origin was shown the greatest consideration. He, however, never had the affability of that other famous millionaire, Mr. Barnato. I fancy, however, that this serious-faced Portuguese Jew was altogether a more powerful man than Barnato; though perhaps not so rich, his schemes were farther reaching. By the arrangement he had arrived at with both the Boers and the Portuguese, he proposed to have a small kingdom to himself. I may be wrong, however, in stating that it was he alone; he represented as well a considerable faction, that knew how artfully to stir up feeling and debate, for its interests, in the government itself; for you never find an important question, but what honest, as well as dishonest, men are divided on it. There were enough to say honestly: Let Nitara alone; it is an international question; it certainly will involve us with the Boers and probably with the German Emperor; no man can say how

far the complication will extend. And there were others to say just as honestly: England alone can govern Englishmen in South Africa; shall we depart from the traditional policy, "Protect an Englishman, wherever he or his trade interest goes?" Well, Tirwin and his associates were with the first faction, for purposes of their own profit; they could as easily have been on the other. Who really were on the other the world now knows, and I will not again run over that list.

As for Halton, after Fraser's explanation I understood his position thoroughly. He was a cautious man; perhaps he did not believe in stirring up any new South African contest: "let the Boers have what they have their hands on." And he owed Tirwin fifty thousand pounds; and the question was, "Wasn't Tirwin his employer equally with the Belaland Company?" "Wasn't Tirwin indeed a part of that Company?" Personally I found him an honest man, with a wonderful knowledge of the conditions of his posi-

tion; indeed, a man who deserved the title he had won of "the great administrator."

During the long days on the veldt Maisie and I kept by our first understanding; and she seemed to seek my company, as I certainly did hers. She confessed to her dislike for Tirwin, and I wondered sometimes how Halton, a gentleman born as he was, could suffer this man to be near his daughter.

The wagon journey in South Africa is indeed an experience leading to intimacies. I knew everybody by the second day, down to the numerous Bela boys who worked at the oxen or the horses. We were a large and elaborate train, due to Tirwin's lavishness. We were all really his guests, I found; and the expedition had originated in an option one of his companies had on a mine near the already great Victoria; he was taking Lindsay up to confer with Brooks, an American also, and the principal engineer of the Victoria.

Such an experience as this of crossing the veldt has been described so often that, though

then novel to me, I suppose I need not enter into details. The long days of rocking motion in Cape cart or wagon, the fine spirits the open puts into your veins, the dim, mysterious wastes about us, or a lion hunt we had, or our talks and jollities, or how we met detachments of the black Bela police—fine, straight natives, content and proud with their duties.

But, one day, we met some mounted Boers; we had crossed the boundary to Nitara.

And another day Victoria, its cabins, its massed tents, appeared over the slopes. Here five thousand people were gathered—not an American mining camp exactly, but a near imitation. We pitched our tents—you brought your own roofs to Nitara in those days—and Brooks came over, and showed us the work he had already done on the Victoria; and we gazed on the sweating Belas labouring there, and wondered at the evidences of a long-forgotten race who had worked this vein with skill and excellent

engineering knowledge, even by our standards.

Tirwin, Brooks, and Lindsay went about their affairs. Halton busied himself in arranging certain details according to the rules in his remarkable systematic mind. Mrs. Lindsay and Mrs. Bagley seemed to enjoy themselves immensely. And I am certain I did, for I was much with Maisie Halton. We rode our ponies about everywhere; we watched the quaint Boer soldiery; I took every opportunity of interrupting any conversation Tirwin had with her, for which she thanked me, as I thought quite proper: Tirwin was not the man to attract a woman's fancy, though his millions might; but they never could gain a clever, clear-eyed girl like Maisie Halton.

One afternoon, which I never shall forget, I met her alone on the long, straggling street of Victoria. As I looked at her, a startling pallor, an intensity in the dark blue eyes, took my attention.

"What is it, Miss Halton?"

Suddenly a look of resolution overspread her face, now faintly flushing.

"Mr. Barton," she said quickly, "will you get a Bela guide, on some pretext or other—hunting—a ride—anything—and cross to Dorp, in Belaland? It's a ten hours' ride. You will find Mr. Fraser there. Tell him to act at once. Mr. Tirwin has sent into the Transvaal an hour ago for reinforcements to the Boers."

I looked at her in astonishment. She knew of the plan to cross into Nitara, then? Had the crisis come which Fraser had warned me about—which I almost had forgotten in the preoccupation of the last days?

"How did you know?"

"A messenger came to Mr. Tirwin with the news that, failing to have the Nitara annexation pushed in London, certain persons —Berner, Sir William Trent—advised acting at once, and that Fraser was to lead the Belaland police here this week."

"Yes, yes, Miss Halton; but how do you know it?" I asked again.

"I overheard him telling my father the news, and that he had sent word at once to the Transvaal."

"And you betray your father, who stands with Mr. Tirwin?" I asked.

"MacIvor Fraser of Glencoe must not fail, after he has done so much," this slip of a girl said with a woman's fierce intensity.

I looked at her, and wondered more than I had before. And I bowed and said, "He is my friend before any of these people, and in some way, I don't know how at this moment, I will get word to him at Dorp."

She gave her hand and looked into my eyes; and, turning, went across to the tents of our party.

I remember the cries of some Bela oxen drivers; I remember that I stood as if stunned. Then I went to look up Brooks; I wanted to ask him for a Bela guide; I would tell him that I wished to take a little ride by myself; I would invent some excuse. I did not dare breathe the matter to Lindsay. I did not know how far my friends were in

Fraser's interest, how far against it. There probably were agents of the movement in Victoria. But I must act for myself, and for Fraser; I did not know who these persons were; I did not dare take the risk of trying to find out. I myself must take the ride over the border to Dorp, to warn Fraser that, if he did not hasten, there would be a Boer force in Nitara which would thwart his plan.

Brooks, whom I, of course, found occupied, treated me considerately, as a fellow-American far away over the seas; he was a keen, wiry, most busy fellow, than whom I suppose there is no better authority in the world on gold quartz. I told him I wanted that afternoon a man who knew the lay of the land; I had a fancy to ride about. I had no compunction in hiding my purpose to this degree, because I knew that he was quite in sympathy with Fraser's and his friends' idea, though I did not so much as dare to express it to him in so many words. He knew exactly the man, an Irish adventurer and pros-

pector, O'Brien, "down on his luck." He would take me to all the skylarking, hunting, or riding I wanted.

As I went out I noted, on my part all unconsciously at this critical time, the variety of adventurers collected about Brooks's quarters—all kinds and types, every nationality in the world, who had been gathered by the prospect of money, or of anything to change their condition in this new field for the wooing of fortune.

I found in O'Brien a red-faced Irishman who said he was ready for anything I asked. I gave him money, and told him to procure two as good ponies as he could. Then I looked up Maisie Halton, but she was not to be found; so I went straight to my purpose, found this O'Brien, with what appeared to be two stout ponies. So without more ado we started, and soon Victoria sank over the slopes, with its variegated, vociferous humanity, its little Boer fort on the hill, already created by the foresight of the Transvaal Government.

So soon as we were in the open I turned to my companion.

"It's not prospecting, or shooting. I want you to lead me to Dorp, in Belaland, and it's twenty pounds in your pocket."

He began a question in considerable surprise and in his more than marked brogue; but I said, to the point, counting on that talismanic name.

"It's for Fraser. Can I count on you?"

I proved that this direct way was how to arrive at the conclusion. My Irish adventurer said he would gladly.

I will not recount the fears and hopes of all the long miles, nor how those vast spaces held my spirit, as they will. I have been in the same mood in Arizona, when a desolate waste confronts you. But though these miles were in green, stretching expanses, they seemed to me not less desolate.

The eventful ride wore on; sometimes we saw the Boer police; and, then, at last, in the moonshine—I was dead weary—we came on the hillocky country, with the flying

flags of the Belaland Company and of England.

"Fraser?" I asked; that was all. But that was enough for the sentry.

CHAPTER VI.

OVER THE BORDER.

THE sentinel and I rode on slowly, neither, I think, saying a word under that Union Jack flying there in the moonshine beside the Company's flag. Then I was directed to Fraser, and rushed in where he was sitting, half undressed.

"Jack Barton!" he said.

And I answered: "As you wish to carry out the reason why your troops are massed here at Dorp, ride over the border to-night, and put your colours over Victoria."

Then I went on and told him the whole circumstances, even to the detail, and how Maisie Halton had started me, a man of forty, wonted to the ways of peace, with only some knowledge of the horse, which one doesn't

forget when one is forty, which is his prime, if he has kept himself well.

"You mean all that," he said, meaning, I saw in his eyes, that she had reported it to me. "And," after some moments, "Tirwin has sent on then, having wind of this?"

"Yes," said I.

He came over to me, this big fellow, shock-haired and resolute, and said, "Jack Barton, you've done well!" And, calling, he said: "Have the men in the saddle. Have word to Colonel Bagley, and to Captain Simpson, and to Mr. Willing that we ride on to-night. They know where."

I had not rested much—I wonder at myself now—but two hours after I was in the midst of some seven hundred armed men, made up as miscellaneously as those forces are, riding in the moonshine over the veldt, over the border, to carry out our purpose, which animated every man of us, that no nation, no soul in the world save English, should have this land of Nitara.

At the dawn we were still riding on,

frighting now and then a Boer scout, who rushed away, carrying the news. And before us, dim and silent, asking no questions even of me, was the great figure of MacIvor Fraser of Glencoe. And I realized what his purpose was—how in this man, who had gone through and experienced so much, was the purpose of the British Empire. He seemed to me in those moments scarce human—rather like some relentless superhuman force. I grasped the truth I have spoken of: we all, however small, represent in our lives some part of the divine purpose—the relentless, resistless action which is for the development of the universe, which, I believe, is God; the faith which animates men to do things, and Fraser of Glencoe had more of that than most of us.

Van Voordt, the Dutch commandant at Victoria, must have rubbed his fat cheeks as he saw our array. He had no means of resistance. On the demand, the flag of Transvaal was run down; the Union Jack replaced it, with close below it the Belaland Com-

pany's. The town was in an uproar; that mongrel population ran mad; everything seemed sure in Nitara, for a government which stood alike for weakest and strongest was in the saddle there, at least for the nonce. Then out of this confusion of many events, which I have put down here so hurriedly, I turned in and slept the dreamless sleep of a healthy and most weary man.

It was then that a deal had happened; as I awoke in that pale dawn, I could not get around that. And I looked out on this town of Victoria, so new, so impossible, and the Bela boy brought the water.

"Well," said I, illy translating what he said—my attempt in his tongue—"what has happened?" For I was still conscious of the great weariness from yesterday's attempt, yet more or less dazed.

His black face answered me in a wreath of smiles. "The Great White Queen had come down on Victoria in Nitara"—the same great White Queen ruled there now.

I understood all that this meant—under-

stood it the more, perhaps, when I went out into the street and ran across my little friend Willing.

"Well," said he, "we are waiting to see what they say in Downing Street of the thing we have done here. What do you think?"

I, indeed, had been part of it; the long night ride, so confusing in its recollection of hurried events, so confusedly put down here; the fact remained in this clear prosaic daylight—the Queen, as exemplified well or ill by her servants, the Belaland police, this morning held Nitara; the Boers were far gone, scattered. I went out to see Fraser.

The man who had done all this I found busy sending despatches, about him many busy faces of those who were interested in his nation-making attempt. He held Nitara that moment by the purest—indeed, the most extraordinary—effrontery, and he held it for England as a trust; if he had defied the law, and put himself above it by this dash across the border, still there was rhyme and reason

for it all in the simple statement "For England."

I found Halton talking to him, the administrator, indeed, in a furious rage.

"How dare you, Mr. Fraser, how dare you?"

"My men have followed me into Nitara," Fraser said; "that is all, sir. When the Government tells me to withdraw, I shall. Now you will notice that British Nitara has welcomed the undertaking."

British Nitara signified, as I have said, much more than three fourths of the population, and the reception which had been accorded our adventurer was not at all uncertain; whatever he had behind him in this ride over the border—possibly it was the Government, possibly but the Company—Fraser of Glencoe had that moment the ardent support of the British, or, to put it better, of the Anglo-Saxons, American, British, or colonial in Nitara. And this moment no British subject was more popular there than he; this moment in the new town he

represented a tremendous degree of enthusiasm; he had dared to do things; he had ridden over the border and possessed himself of the colony. But to Halton this was another matter. Whether Fraser was supported or not, the outstanding fact was that he had performed an act of private robbery. This big fellow, Fraser, sat there, drumming a table with his knuckles and listening to the accusations of the Belaland administrator.

"Well, well, sir," he said at last, "this must be a disappointment to Mr. Tirwin."

At the moment the Portuguese stood in the doorway—thin, sallow, his black eyes holding an ugly look. I wondered if he or Halton suspected that the hastening of Fraser was due to Maisie Halton having told me what she had overheard.

But to return to the matter in hand; the director, the fabulous millionaire, looked at the employee. Yet Fraser's calm gray eye must have nonplussed him.

"What does this mean?"

Fraser rose and went to the window, and

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pointed to the colours waving over the poor little fort.

"That's the significance of it, Mr. Tirwin. This Nitara situation admitted of no delay, and so I am here; or rather we are here"—and he indicated the Company's soldiery on the hillside—"because the affair admitted no delay."

"Is Sir William in this?" the Portuguese asked.

"I take the responsibility," Fraser said calmly; "that, indeed, is all I have to say about it."

"But I am a director of the Company."

"Well, to repeat the obvious," Fraser said slowly, "the Company's troops hold this place."

"It doesn't admit argument," I said from the background. But these potential persons did not so much as notice me; I suppose to Tirwin I was not noticeable.

"I can go—back—to Cape Town," the Portuguese said in dull anger, looking at this servant of the Company.

"There is no detention. You can come, you can go," Fraser said simply.

The Portuguese without a further word turned on his heel and went out, leaving Halton and me. Fraser wheeled and faced the man whose daughter he held so important.

"Mr. Halton," he said, "I dislike that man Tirwin, you know."

"Yes, yes," Halton said.

"I represent an interest diametrically opposed to him. How do you stand, sir?"

"I ought to have prevented this," Halton said.

"How could you have prevented what you didn't even expect? But this man—this Tirwin—he would have more profit, he considers, from the old conditions than from any honest British rule in Nitara."

"Yes, yes."

"Mr. Halton," Fraser said, advancing a step, "you have small sympathy with Colonel Bagley, with Captain Pierson, with your nephew Jim Willing, with me, who have dashed over here?"

"You must carry it out," said Halton lamely, looking at him in surprise, "now that it's done."

"We shall, we will; I will. But now here is your position: you are disappointed."

"An English jail awaits you and the others, Mr. Fraser," Halton said, raising his finger like a mentor; "an English jail, do ye hear?"

"I have always," Fraser said with a certain ring of pride, "at least had the strength to stand by what I have done. I have done this," he ended. "But, Mr. Halton——" He paused, and then his voice came out quick and impetuous, stating again the reason in the flying colours on the little fort: that the Boers had been superseded in Victoria, Nitara. Halton stammered, and looked at Fraser in sheer astonishment. But seeing that I ought not to listen further, I went out. A woman was passing on a Cape pony, which she reined as I came into the street of that ambitious town of Victoria. She was Maisie Halton.

"You did it beautifully, Mr. Barton," she said hurriedly, her face reddening.

"He knows it was through you."

"He knows that," she said softly.

But of course I said nothing of the interesting talk that was taking place in the room I had left—that concerned her father, the administrator, so much. But why hadn't Fraser rushed over to see her, instead of waiting as he had? I declare if Maisie Halton had dared so much for me as she had for him I should have——

But why should I be silly about what I should have done and shouldn't have done?

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THEY SAID AND DID IN VICTORIA.

LET us say then, if you would picture the scene, that this mining-camp town street was most animated with a great faith in Fraser. Whatever he represented wasn't he the man who had saved North Belaland to the Company? He could not have done all he had done, all he had dared, unless something strong and significant lay behind him. You must imagine these varied adventurers who expected Fortune to present them with chances outrageously in their favour. So when the beginning of that they had hoped for had happened—the beginning of a British possession of this land worked by Anglo-Saxons, with Anglo-Saxon hopes, of power and money and territory, they believed that

Fraser and his men could not have made that dash across the border unless they had behind them at least the assurance of Governmental support.

Such, then, was the situation as I stood in that rough street and talked with the daughter of the administrator of Belaland, who had warned Fraser that a plan was on foot to avoid the consequences of his scheme or the scheme of those behind and supporting him. The plan was to warn the Boers. Well, to make a long description short, what was happening somewhere else? Would these men end accused, doubtless convicted, of high treason? Was Nitara to be South African Dutch or British?

Maisie Halton understood all this as she leaned over her saddlebow and talked to me about it; indeed, with wonderful clearness, considering that she was only a girl of nineteen.

"You know," she said, "I am sure that my father's and Mr. Fraser's interest in this matter are identical."

She had said nothing before which seemed an attempt at justifying her action in betraying the talk she had heard between her father and Tirwin. Now I quite wondered why she did. What reason had she for explaining what she had done, or rather what I had so readily executed for her?

While we talked Tirwin saw us. He probably knew me as Fraser's agent; but whether he did or not, he now crossed directly to where I stood by Maisie Halton's pony's head. His keen, shrewd face, his tired Jew's eyes, which yet held so great possibility of action behind them, were fixed in a certain, affable smile. Now he bowed low to Miss Halton without particularly noticing me, which was quite reasonable, as I was certainly a most unimportant American tourist. Why should a man who thought he had in his hands the destinies of a province?

"I am going back to Cloutsie this afternoon. I must, you know. I think, with matters so unsettled as they appear to be here, it

would be better for you, my dear Miss Halton, to go with us."

"Really," she said, with a cool hauteur such as a woman, even a good one, may assume to a man who admires her, whose attentions become to her not only disagreeable, but almost insolent, because not wanted nor expected. But Tirwin with all his acuteness erred where a woman was concerned; he was one of those fellows—obtuse, perhaps, only in this—who believe that their particular attentions can not be rejected or avoided. So he went on quite confidently:

"I am sure you will see that you would better return with me—Mr. Halton and you, Miss Maisie. Nitara is too unsettled at present."

"That remains with my father."

"He will approve of it."

"I am not so sure of that," Maisie Halton retorted. "He may change his mind when the situation here is presented to him reasonably." She brought the careening pony back to a position, as she was a very

good horsewoman. I knew her apparent struggles with the vicious little beast were only to avoid Tirwin as much as possible.

At this moment an interruption came from an unexpected quarter. A tall, fair-haired man, sitting his horse very well, rode into the square, and, seeing Tirwin, turned it toward that personage. As he jumped down and bowed to Miss Halton I saw Griffin, then the South African representative of the Enterprise—a man once quite distinguished as a war correspondent. He had done a number of things in the Balkans, and quite recently had served with some professional distinction in the China-Japanese and the Græco-Turkish campaigns.

"Mr. Tirwin, the whole world is stirred up about this," he said, with his eyes on Maisie Halton, who appeared very vivacious and pretty and delightful that moment; "everybody is talking about what you have done."

"I trust it's not reported I have done it. Where are you from, Mr. Griffin?"

"Cloutsie. I had news on the way—Nicholas Boeder and three thousand Boers are up to dispossess you."

"I am not sorry, I am not sorry," the Portuguese said hurriedly; and Griffin acknowledged by bowing his head that Tirwin's sorrow over anti-Boer ascendency in Nitara was very well understood. "I am sorry for those men, for Fraser, and the others; a Boer prison for them."

"Well, well," the correspondent said, "I can't tell nor predict what the Government will feel called on to do in the premises; they'll have to wait for London. Only I hold that down here in South Africa we have the peace of Europe on our hands. And it's best, it seems to me, that this enterprise which is represented by Fraser should be nipped in the bud."

Tirwin said something that surprised me, "I am not prepared to say that." Then I knew that, whatever his attitude or his interest, he acknowledged the bare possibility of that expedition under Fraser succeeding,

and that, as usual with his class of schemers, he was determined to stand well with it should that contingency become fact.

"But if Nicholas Boeder and his Boers get up here," the newspaper man questioned, "what of that?"

Just then Maisie Halton called to me. Griffin was still staring hard at her, and I proceeded to introduce them. Bringing her pony nearer, she extended a slim, gloved hand; her eyes were sparkling. "I know you, Mr. Griffin! Everybody does, in fact, because everybody reads your articles."

"Oh, I don't know," said that person; "I just feel, of course, that they ought to."

"You know I am the administrator's, Mr. Halton's, daughter, so I take a natural interest in knowing what is to happen. You say the Boers are coming up here in force. —So, Mr. Tirwin," she said, turning to him with an air of infinite disdain, "your message must have reached them; they couldn't have been started in so short a time if that were not the case."

I had seen the millionaire lose his temper now twice that day—once in Fraser's presence, and this time his sallow face even flushed at the accusation of this clear-eyed girl. Perhaps he would not have minded so much had it not been in the presence of a man, Griffin, who was industriously looking for news, of course. He was in Nitara to see the situation, and here he would see his way to an interesting cable: "Tirwin was fighting the Fraser faction; Sir William Trent, perhaps; so hard as that!"

"Ah, Miss Halton," Tirwin said slowly, "if you have let the cat out of the bag, I'll not deny the cat. I did send down over the border so soon as I had heard that Fraser of Glencoe might get the signal to start. Why should I deny the cat to Mr. Griffin? My opinion was and is: Such a raid into a neutral territory is the most dangerous event that can happen to South Africa. I did not believe it could reach this point. When I was advised by messenger from Cape Town, I

sent the messenger across to Nicholas Boeder —that is all."

But Maisie Halton said:

"I overheard you telling my father about it, Mr. Tirwin."

"In that way," the Portuguese said, still calmly enough, "the news of it was sent to MacIvor Fraser of Glencoe and his friends, and they hastened the matter."

This slight girl had suddenly taken on the air of a woman, and in all frankness, in the presence of the representative of a big London newspaper, she was acknowledging that she had summoned Fraser here. Her thin, fine face perhaps flushed slightly; she bit her lips as if to hold back a cry; the clear blue eyes perhaps lost something of their clearness. But her voice now came out distinctly and positively, admitting the whole circumstance. I can see her now in the square of that rough town on the little tossing pony.

"A woman, Mr. Tirwin, has a right to an opinion in a crisis like this. Why shouldn't

I act on it, I say, even if it was opposed to my father? He, I assure you, knew nothing about it, that I told Mr. Fraser through his friend, Mr. Barton there, acting as messenger."

What could be said by Tirwin? He might accuse her of treachery because of the way in which she had the news of his message, but she would acknowledge it all. And in years she was scarce a woman. As a matter of fact, in these days of advanced women it might not be so strange for even a girl to have opinions so positive that she would act as Maisie Halton had. Tirwin could no more than suspect her feeling toward Fraser; there was nothing further to be said about them than that they had met; so, as it seemed, it all must be the case of a strong-minded young woman.

"It was rather treacherous, I acknowledge," she said. "But I wanted to tell how it happened, and to show that I am not afraid of the consequences.—Mr. Barton, may I see you in a few moments at our lodging?"

And nodding to us, her face now a bright red, she whipped up the little brute, which tore away with its very pretty burden.

"What a brick of a girl!" Griffin said. "I wonder how she made it up with Halton?"

"Trust her for that, trust her. I must see Fraser," and Tirwin, too, left us standing there.

"This is a situation!" said Griffin, whistling; "and there are three parts of it to be reported by the newspaper—one in London, one among the officials of the Belaland and Chartered Companies, and one on the ground, where I am."

"You have learned something while you are here, just stopping in this square of Victoria. Now I needn't ask you not to have Miss Halton's name mentioned."

"She's too nice a little girl," he said rather regretfully, as he lit a stubby pipe. "No, no, of course I won't. But it's a good deal for a little girl like that to do, just for an opinion."

Then I gave him quickly the only retort I had, "You can never tell about women," though you know I could tell very well, and particularly about this particular one. "You must have found out the plot to cross the border about as soon as Tirwin's agents or principals down there, you arrived so shortly," I said.

"I did, we did, as soon as they," he acknowledged with a show of considerable pride in his own or his newspaper's prowess in obtaining news; and so by some flattery I changed the subject from Maisie Halton.

"There will be no end of a row all over the world. Think of this, with the precedent of the Jameson raid," he said.

"You then believe Nicholas Boeder and his band will be here?" I asked.

"Of course they will; the Boers are bound to treat Fraser and his men as filibusters."

You must remember that this was still the morning after; that we all in that place were excited over a raid of which we yet could

not foresee the consequences. Would Fraser of Glencoe succeed or fail? We called him even then the head of the Frasers of Glencoe. Was it for him public disgrace or public recognition?

So I went on to Maisie Halton. She was standing, just dismounted, her hands crossed, her face meditative, and still rather rosy. Now she turned directly to me and said:

"What did Mr. Griffin say about it?"

I told her briefly.

"And Tirwin? What will he do?"

"I think he will stay here to watch the situation for himself."

"So much is going on in London; yes, his cause is being fought there."

I acknowledged that this was so; it was simply whether or no the Government would support Fraser; it all hinged on that. I believed that, so far as holding out against Nicholas Boeder and his Boers, we had Nitara well enough. (I did not count, you will see, on the absolute physical bravery of those fellows.) She seemed relieved at this point

of view, for she at once turned to the other side of the subject.

"They don't fancy that—I care for Mr. Fraser?"

"I think that both Tirwin and Mr. Griffin simply considered you a very opinionated young lady," I replied.

"And I have not seen him. What was it about him and that woman, Mrs. MacDonald, in that Barkur affair?" she asked quickly.

Was she jealous of him, then? I asked myself. But I went on and told the story, and her eyes were bent down, and I could almost follow her thoughts. For myself, I was thinking, over and over again, what an extraordinary affair, what a remarkable case of "love at first sight"! And why wasn't Fraser here? Why was he so busied that he did not seek her out at once? But I was doing my friend injustice.

For as we talked I saw Fraser throwing his rein to a Bela boy. He came across to her and took her hand, and I heard him say:

"I told you it would be dangerous here in Nitara."

"But is it not true, won't you acknowledge it, that it was well I was here for your plan?"

And she looked him straight in the eyes, and I heard him say:

"Yes, for me, and for what is greater than I—my purpose in Nitara."

But here I turned and went away, realizing that on both sides, however it might have been reached, their understanding was complete; as for how it had been reached, it's still, I say, a mystery. You must accept it as I have stated it.

But there was Halton. How was he to receive the fact of his daughter being committed to Fraser of Glencoe? How would he explain to Tirwin, whom he owed fifty thousand pounds, and to whom he himself was more or less committed, his daughter's treachery to him? By a very simple method indeed—Maisie Halton was in love with Fraser. Their attachment was

a matter entirely beyond Halton's control.

I wish I could make you see, as I see them, the next days in Nitara, where a quiet determination to hold the place at any cost animated every one of us—English, American, and other adventurers, down to the veriest Bela, who had small liking for the notion of an exchange of English for Boer rule—every one in Victoria those days was willing to fight for it. And all the while was suspense. What was being done in London? Would the counsels to support or to punish these daring men prevail? I know my own decided opinions of the situation will be criticised by certain members of Parliament, by some journalists and lesser folk. But in the premises, closely identified as I was with the leaders of the military part of the movement, how could I, how could I fail to support it, nor to show in these pages my personal bias? And I am only one of many, many thousands in South Africa at that time, and this, too, who say there are colonial interests that the

home Government fail to comprehend, or, if they do comprehend, to act on properly. Well, well, it resolves itself to *quot homines, tot sententiæ.* I am only an American, of Anglo-Saxon descent, trying to regard it from the Anglo-Saxon world interest point of view.

The feminine part of our expedition was not sent back, the country being too unsettled. Fraser now thought it better to wait until he had measured conclusions with Nicholas Boeder, whatever these might prove to be. Tirwin, too, remained to the end of the affair, whether out of consideration for his skin or because he thought he could do his own cause more good there, I am not prepared to say. He had messengers, however, every day scurrying down across the veldt to Cloutsie. Nor was Fraser short in this: he sent down several faithful men, among others my little friend Willing.

As for Fraser and Maisie Halton, the women, who are lynx-eyed on such a matter, I believe, understood it all thoroughly. You could see it when the two were together,

which was not often with so busy a man. Halton understood it; I think his daughter, Fraser, and he had reached an understanding.

As for Tirwin and Fraser, they, knowing each other the most out-and-out enemies, their interests being diametrically opposed, yet met with a certain urbanity of good manners. Tirwin had told Fraser exactly the situation. Why should Tirwin deny, indeed, what was evident? Yet he gave Fraser to understand, I believe, that should he succeed he might call on his strong favour; the Portuguese was even playing on that possibility, although ever adding to the leader at Nitara:

"I don't see how you can succeed with all the forces against you. England has to listen to the world's opinion."

To which Fraser said, shrugging his shoulders:

"Mr. Tirwin, England's one safety is the principle of empire. If you believe that principle correct, I am entirely in the right."

How Halton, a strictly honourable man, as I have said, and in debt to Tirwin, stood

between the two, I did not understand at first. He did this I found later, as I have said, by showing that Maisie's position was not his; hers was the interest in a man, Fraser; she was stubborn; he could not overcome that. But in matters political, where he was committed to Tirwin, he remained quite unchanged; Tirwin must understand that.

Then Tirwin, who had discovered, as I suspected was the case, that he himself cared for Maisie Halton, began to hate Fraser of Glencoe the more. Fraser was trying to defeat his material prospects in the concessions for the mines and trade of Nitara, and Fraser, too, was opposed to him in the case of a young woman whom he dared to think he wanted to possess. But Tirwin went toward the accomplishment of an object by secret and devious ways. Just as Fraser, being the popular hero of Nitara that moment, did not consider it his best policy to appear very angry or displeased with the leader, so in the case of Maisie Halton he accepted Halton's assurances, and at the same time thought of a

plan which, in connection with his greater plan, might turn my honest English girl heroine to him.

Let me say here, if you think she is figuring in these complications too considerably, I certainly can prove that there have been women in most great cases, and the one of Nitara was no exception.

So some days passed, as I say; so the question was being fought elsewhere along diplomatic and political lines, while Fraser of Glencoe held Nitara.

Then one day they came riding over the slopes to tell us that Nicholas Boeder and a great force of Boers were below, and wished to confer with the leader of the British adventurers. How had he dared? What did it mean? How far had he the support of the Government of Great Britain. Boeder was assured he hadn't it at all.

You can fancy the excitement that day in Victoria; how men talked together; how the women of our party began to tremble for their husbands, these same Boers being

such terrible fighters; how my heroine walked erect and self-held, strong enough not to show her fear for the man she loved.

Nicholas Boeder, as I say, paused on the veldt like the leader of a hostile army, and sent word to Fraser to come to him. Fraser went with Colonel Bagley and Halton, who wanted to say officially that the Belaland Company had nothing to do with the invasion. By my request, as Fraser's personal friend, I rode out with them. Tirwin had a long talk with Halton before we started.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MEETING OF DUTCH AND ENGLISH.

So, leaving busy and noiseful Victoria, we rode into the stillness of the South African plain to meet the great Boer leader, who in many respects resembled the famous Mr. Krueger. There were just five of us besides those named, Fraser having taken Nicholas Boeder's word as entirely to be trusted, for as much as we might say about this man, his life, his conduct, had been entirely within the teachings of a colonistic training. His had been the life of the frontier Boer, and he felt within him strongly all of the Boer sense of nationality which had led them to see in the British point of view of the aggression of territory simply something to be feared, to be held out against, as weaker holds out against

the stronger in all the physical world, which means, I suppose, the struggle of the survival of the fittest. Now let me record something that Fraser said of this same British point of view of territorial aggression, which, while perhaps not particularly new, impressed me strongly as we rode in the stillness of the vast spaces of the veldt; perhaps he had said much the same thing in the speech he had made at Cloutsie.

"It's this," he said, defining his position again; "I have always felt strongly the British territorial idea. But I find that we don't care so much about English rule, much as we do care about it, being patriotic, as for the strong central government. It's the natural Anglo-Saxon tendency to acquire territory; that gave us our original American possessions. If it hadn't been for that, the United States, for example, too, would have been still but the thirteen seaboard States. Now in South Africa I see no power that can control that Anglo-Saxon tendency save ourselves. And that's the idea animating our

present appearance in Nitara. If there may be those who were with us in this course out of a desire to increase certain investments—if, too, a portion of the men we brought over with us are mere adventurers—most of us are here because we see that without English rule Nitara will be a constant source of international trouble and perplexity."

Now you may differ from Fraser of Glencoe; you are at liberty to, of course, but it seems to me a conclusive argument, just as it should be with us in America when such a question as the annexation of Hawaii is broached. But why should I try to convince you if you don't wish to be convinced? There has been no question from the Magna Charta to the abolition of slavery that has not had its quite legitimate two sides.

But to return to the narrative (I seem to be continually digressing, since one must reason on the questions presented by such a career as Fraser of Glencoe's). As we rode on we saw Boer scouts, strong, stout fellows, roughly clad, who looked for the most as if

they had just come from the plough. Soon we saw proof of what our pickets had brought us, that the force was very considerable. Fraser had at that moment some fifteen hundred men in Nitara whom he could have brought into battle. The Boers, as we afterward learned, were perhaps three or four hundred stronger, men who were among the best shots in the world, and not enemies to be held in contempt.

Soon Boeder, accompanied by two companions, came forward to meet him. Both sides dismounted and exchanged the amenities of such an occasion. I saw in Boeder a man of about fifty, short, thick-set, with ill-fitting clothes even by a Boer rider's standard, with keen, tireless gray eyes, under thick, shaggy brows. He might have been forty or fifty; one of those men who become prematurely aged for all of a life mostly out of doors.

Fraser left it to him to make the advances, and he said with the tone of command that he wanted to know by what

right Fraser's force was in Nitara; why had Van Coortlandt and his men been dispossessed at Victoria. And Fraser said very calmly:

"This territory, sir, is in dispute, you'll acknowledge?"

"Yes, yes; but until that dispute is decided we claim that our occupation is entirely legitimate—because possession."

"But we, sir, become convinced that you couldn't keep the order desired. If the English or the international courts decide that we are in the wrong, we will retire. Now, if we were mistaken, we have the possession at least. We intend to keep it."

"You—you—who do you represent—not the Belaland Company?"

"The administrator, Mr. Halton, is here and can assure you that the Company is not behind us."

"Not in the least, not in the least; nor the Queen's Government in any way," the administrator hastened to state.

"No, we represent men in Nitara who

wanted a government other than your own. Should a Queen's officer appear, we will hand over the country to him."

Nicholas Boeder, of course, saw clearly that in such an event the Boers never would be restored to their old position, and he announced that he or his government didn't propose to have such a contingency exist. Should a Queen's force appear, the Boers should hold Victoria, which statement recognised the whole idea of Fraser's occupation. The Queen's officials appearing, why they would simply say, what Fraser and his followers wanted: "Why, we will hold this place for Great Britain until the territorial question is decided; these people are British citizens. We find you Boers can't keep order."

So when Fraser stated that he would not give up save to British authorities what he had ventured so much to gain, Boeder was compelled to say, rather savagely, that within two hours he would have to take Victoria by force and to hang Fraser and his companions, or at least to leave the question of their pun-

ishment to the decision of the courts of the Transvaal Republic.

We saluted then and rode each his way, we past the frowning Boer sentinels out into the opening veldt. I heard Halton say to Fraser bitterly enough:

"You appreciate, I hope, now the seriousness of the complication. It's a fight."

"It's utter failure or partial success, I understand," the big leader said almost lightly. He had in him that spirit which had won among the Afghans, and again so many times in Belaland. But never had the odds against him been so great. And we all felt it; and no one more than I, who was here by the merest accident, and who had nothing considerable at stake, save my interest in my friend's welfare.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE WAR.

As we rode on we saw over a hillock a body of horsemen. Fraser, and we all after him, spurred toward them. From their number rode Pierson.

"It's the fight," Fraser said to him, "as I predicted."

"Very well, Mr. Fraser," said Pierson grimly; "so be it."

"The fight!" cried Halton; "you mean you had all this arranged?"

"I propose to meet Nicholas Boeder on the veldt to try our issue," Fraser said; "not in Victoria, where we risk the women, the children, and the Company's buildings."

He called to me, and when I was by his side he said: "Tell Maisie Halton I couldn't

see her again before this happened. There is nothing more to say, for she will understand."

Then, with a command to his men, after directing two to accompany Halton and me to Victoria, he rode away. He paused for a moment, watching the troop cantering away, and then, side by side with Halton, I turned toward Victoria. Suddenly the latter said, "He is one of those men who are either fools or heroes—men who have to lead."

"By the necessities of their characters," I said. "I am glad you acknowledge so much."

"I am not opposed to Fraser personally, God knows," he went on. "But, in the first place, I was committed to Tirwin, and his position in the Belaland Company. Now prudence would lead me to condemn this whole proceeding; it means too much. Yet he has gone so far, I hope he will succeed, or else there'll be a pretty kettle of fish."

Yes, for certain there would be. But I was glad because of Maisie that his feelings were that way. When, very discreetly, I

broached the subject of his daughter and Fraser, he said shortly that he didn't know that his opposition mattered; it was queer at the best, she hardly knew the man; but she would have it her way, and what could he do—which, to be sure, is a very common attitude forced on parents, although I didn't try to console him by saying so much.

As we approached Victoria we saw the place was near deserted by the men. Their orders, all unknown to Halton and me, had been definitely passed before we had left.

Tirwin met us as we rode into the little deserted, excited place, and called Halton aside to learn of him the result of the negotiation. I kept on to see Maisie, who seemed to read my message in my eyes.

"He's not coming back—first?"

"No, not until after the battle, which he expects to be fought on the veldt;" and I told her what he had told me to tell her.

"It is such a critical time for him," she said softly.

"For him first, and for all those gentle-

manly adventurers from Belaland. But trust to Fraser's energy, Miss Halton."

"He will have so much to follow, whatever the result to-day. Ah! we knew something important was to take place, for all day the separate detachments have been going out on to the veldt, one after the other. I have only read of battles, you know," she ended, with a poor little girlish laugh.

"Do you know," I said on my part, "that when I first saw you you were a frivolous girl. That wasn't so long ago—at polo in Cloutsie—not a month. Yet lately you have become a woman, and not an ordinary one."

"He is not an ordinary man," she said. "As for me, I am just an ordinary English girl."

"Well," said I, laughing, "we will not discuss that now, any more than the strange account you two give of your sudden understanding."

"Who knows about that?" she said then. "It may be fancy to others, but to us it seems the truest of truths. But come, Mr. Barton,

we will not speak of that any more. It's a foregone conclusion. We will take a little stroll, if you are not too tired, to see the nuns. They are so delightful to me."

South Africa has had from its first settlement one of the most charitable, the kindliest, and so the holiest, of Roman sisterhoods carrying on its work. Here in Victoria, among miners and the roughest of rough folk —men too often drunken and sodden and brutal—they pursued their gentle, pious charities. After I had had my dash of cold water and brushed up a bit, she and I went up the little hill where they had established themselves and talked with them, and Maisie—good angel that she was—made it sweeter for a half hour to a poor dying girl whom the sisters were tending. And I, on my part, had a long talk with the priest, who was the clergyman of this far half-savage parish, and he told me of the work he had accomplished among the Belas, making me think of the stories of the fathers who had wrought so faithfully in the old time among the Indians of French Canada.

For this man was a French priest, too. He expressed his grave fears about the troubles before us all, without, however, showing any bias for Boer or English. Then Maisie and I walked back together, and talked for awhile with Mrs. Bagley, that good, honest, garrison wife, and my vivacious little countrywoman, Mrs. Lindsay, who was all excitement. Among these others Maisie Halton was very quiet and self-contained.

Shortly I went to Robinson's office, where were Lindsay, Halton, and Tirwin, who was walking to and fro with his arms crossed behind him, reminding me more than anything of a caged hyena, with the same stealthy tread.

"Who is that?" said Lindsay from the door. "I'll be hanged, Willing!" And little Willing entered, very hot and dirty and fagged.

"I'm after 'em when I have a horse, I'm after 'em!" the boy said.

"You are up from Cloutsie?" asked Tirwin.

"Yes, just got in."

"What's the news down there?"

"Oh, they're gossipping and conjecturing. My nigger has got a pile of papers. Oh, here's my fresh mount!" And he was outside and scampering over the plain in the direction he seemed to know the men before him had taken, a Bela boy guide following. Yes, the campaign plainly had been all planned and well understood.

We civilians went on talking together, craning our necks, perhaps, when Tirwin went out to meet a half-dozen men who were evidently his messengers or agents.

"It pleases him mightily," said Robinson, watching from the door. "Oh, he's not coming back. Have some whisky anybody? I've a little Scotch left. Won't you, Mr. Halton?"

But the administrator said "Thanks," and, saying he had some duties to perform, left us. Robinson wondered what Halton could have to do, and then we three Americans sat down together, and Lindsay and

Robinson told stories of what they had seen and done in Colorado and Africa, making me, who have been a loafer all my life, feel very much out of it. I had neither work nor a family, I said, with a rush of loneliness. But presently their stories began to interest me, so that I forgot my "blue-devils." They told of frontiersmen and frontier experiences, stories as good as Bret Harte's very own. They went on to the almost incalculable riches under this Nitarian soil; it seemed that it would reduce the price of gold; nothing in California nor in the Johannesburg nor the Alaskan fields had been like it. Then they came to what they seemed to understand—to Tirwin, really their employer, who, not satisfied with the Victoria mines, aspired to much more—who wished English control kept out of Nitara for his own private reasons. But, of course, Lindsay's and Robinson's sympathies, as Anglo-Saxons, were with Fraser's raiders.

We were interrupted by a staccato of distant musketry, borne to Victoria by the brisk

southern wind, and we knew they were fighting far in the distance, not with artillery, but as two bodies of cavalry meet. And we shuddered, thinking of the consequences. And Lindsay said that he thought Mrs. Lindsay would be nervous, and he had better go down to see her. And I thought of Maisie Halton; yet, since she knew she had my sympathy, and not seeing how I could help her, I stayed on with Robinson.

For hours those sounds came at intervals, carrying fear, until toward sundown a few stragglers returned, some of them wounded, saying the fight was very fierce, and much against the English invaders or possessors, what you will, according to your bias on that question. And you can imagine the consternation spreading. The Boers would wreak their vengeance on those helpless folk left in Victoria; and many stories were told of Boer brutality, mostly exaggerated by the circumstances. And all the time the restless Tirwin was rushing about, considering his great properties there, and knowing more than we knew.

I believe, indeed, that no one slept in Victoria that night.

And so at midnight, when there came a sound of men's voices and a slow procession, we all went out and saw by lantern light figures stretched out on some rough litters. There were some thirty of these, who were carried up to the sisters on the hill. Before they were carried was a woman's cry, and there was a face I knew, and my friend Mrs. Bagley stretched out on a box.

"Don't mind, Bess; though we have lost over a hundred men, we have held our own."

"But you, Mike Bagley, you!" moaned the poor wife.

"Oh, I'm all right," said this good officer; and then Maisie Halton was there, giving Mrs. Bagley comfort, and showing herself brave and true and strong, while I knew her heart wanted to make her cry out.

There was by good fortune a surgeon in Nitara besides the priest, who was not a very skilful one. He, the English missionary, was kept very busy; more wounded following,

the most after these first having had to endure besides their wounds the aggravation of being brought in on horseback or in their comrades' arms. When I asked about Bagley, the missionary told me that the colonel's case was very serious.

I don't know how we endured that night, but at last was the dull gray dawn reaching across the veldt. Did you ever see a sunrise in that region, sometimes wonderful, indeed; and at last the whole expanse of sky blazed, and bent down until the distances of the plain borrowed the glories of the skies, as if mighty heaven were embracing the earth, and the earth responding.

Close after sunrise the irregular firing began again, now brought to us by the changing wind of the veldt, now borne away.

I think about ten o'clock the news came from a cheering horseman—Fraser had won; Nicholas Boeder himself was prisoner.

This news was hardly in before a mass of troops appeared on the southern slopes, and soon we saw they were governmental cavalry,

with no less a person than Lord Rutnen himself, the general commanding that part of South Africa.

Then we all, from Tirwin down or up, knew that one part of the plan had carried; England herself had interfered; England for a time held Nitara; the possession was accomplished. But there is rather a question whether that occupation by the Government would have succeeded if the Boers had not been defeated. The fact of Nicholas Boeder himself being a prisoner proved that these malcontents had been stronger than the Boer government and, of course, gave colour to their case. The Boers could not keep order in Nitara; everything had been pivotal on the battle of the veldt.

Lord Rutnen was busying himself with inquiries, and examining into the state of the wounded, when another troop was seen on the veldt, and these tattered and torn and begrimed fellows were the troopers who had succeeded. We all cheered, Lord Rutnen's escort not the least of all. And I saw some-

where Maisie Halton's pale, earnest face and sparkling eyes.

Fraser of Glencoe rode slowly into the square, strong, broad-shouldered, if the gray eyes showed weariness, and dismounted before the Queen's representative.

"My lord, I am Fraser of the Belaland police. This adventure, occasioned by conditions here, is now in your hands."

"You hold the position, then?" Lord Rutnen asked, as if he did not know.

"Entirely; we do, that is, and it is handed over into your hands, the Queen's hands."

"You and your leaders are under arrest, Mr. Fraser."

But in Lord Rutnen's tone there was a ring of admiration, a tribute. This was Fraser, who had secured the miles of North Belaland to Great Britain, and now actually he had accomplished another as important feat.

"I understand that, I expected that; we all are ready to be tried for our offence, for it to be proved."

"Eleven make the list I now have; you first, Colonel Pierson, Colonel Bagley——"

"Colonel Bagley is dead," said a voice.

"Dead!" said Fraser, turning, awed.

"Dead!" Lord Rutnen himself muttered; "a brave officer, a good man."

CHAPTER X.

THE INDISCRETION OF AN IMPULSIVE MAN, AND THE NOSE OF FIFTY MILLION POUNDS STERLING.

I WAS again in the club at Cloutsie, a far cry, indeed, from Nitara and its rough, engrossing events, for here men sat dawdling all day; here was the sophistication of the British colonial; quite as sophisticated possibly as the Briton at home, in his minor way. (I have found it ever an interesting way. These colonial places, with their manners a bit easier, appeal to me rather more than the capitals, than London, New York, Paris.) And here was I, smoking a long cigar, and sipping a B. and S., and talking of many matters, and telling many times of my experiences with Fraser in Nitara, and those who hadn't been there—there were, indeed, only a few who had—asking me question after

question, and listening with rapt faces. Fraser was Fraser who had succeeded and failed in a degree; if he had gained the object of himself and his supporters or principals, he equally was now the black sheep. Great Britain would cheerfully keep Nitara, but Fraser must be punished, since somebody certainly must be held responsible. As for Nitara, Lord Rutnen, that persistent and implacable veteran, certainly would look well to our interests there. (I say "our"; it was all ours. In a South African club you talk entirely from the British standpoint; the British inspiration, I may put it, perhaps more pertinently.)

But to go back a bit: I have left my narrative in Nitara. Well, the prisoners were sent down to Cloutsie, where they were not admitted to bail. I had followed, like the tail to a comet, in the wagon train of Halton, his daughter, and the great Tirwin, who maintained all the journey a certain meditative air, and I wondered what he was devising.

Poor Maisie had lost her old vivacity, and

had grown a bit hollow-eyed, thinking what would happen to Fraser; but she found time to try to cheer Mrs. Bagley, than whom never was a woman more broken down. That good lady, who had shown, as I said, all the peculiarities of a woman long wonted to army life with its frivolities and gossip, now was changed to a stony-eyed, despairful woman. Bagley had gone out of her life—Bagley, her all, for they had no children. Nor was the good wife, indeed, the only admirer of this very distinguished officer, and who felt in his loss a personal grief. Of the some hundred killed in the battle of the veldt, he seemed the most irreplaceable. These men had died for a principle, I must say here; the Government would not act in Nitara when action was necessary, and they had. So a certain part of the press said, lauding them to the skies, while another part styled them a sorry lot of rascally adventurers. So members thundered in the House of Commons, and in the Lords the question was debated. Fraser of Glencoe was recalled now as Fraser of Barkur, a man once

in the deepest disgrace. But the other side said he was Fraser who had gained North Belaland to the Empire, who, too, had done so much among the Afghans; who, in this case, had made the Government act when action was necessary, when it never would have acted, because action was clogged by designing persons. So he was for one side hero, while for the other scapegoat.

And who were behind these adventurers? How did Mr. Berner and Sir William Trent stand? But these two gentlemen's positions were well enough understood; nobody who lived or had property in South Africa but held Fraser a hero. Yet a hero who must suffer; who with his leaders must pay the price of punishment for acquiring territory England now would never give up. Every army man admired him; England owed him a debt; yet, owing it, must punish him. Why, his punishment was the little pretence owed to the nations. How the press of the nations growled about it, the newspapers of my own dear United States not the least of them all!

And what things were said in Paris and in Berlin! Did not the German Emperor threaten England with all sorts of possibilities if she didn't take her hands off Nitara at once? And England said very politely that she would take her hands off when she was assured somebody else would keep order there. As for her own criminal filibusters, they should be very properly punished to the world's entire satisfaction, which meant just that the man and his followers, to whom England owed the territory of Nitara—which she certainly never would give up—must be the sacrifices.

What did Fraser get out of it? somebody asked; and we who knew him answered, Just the satisfaction of having done it, because he believed it had to be done, because he considered that if England did not have Nitara continual misrule would prevail. Wasn't that enough to a man of his temperament?

And the meantime the Boers howled and demanded Fraser's punishment; but Nicholas Boeder, who had been released at once by

Lord Rutnen, declared his opponent one of the bravest men he knew; that he was fighting for English rule, exactly as Boeder was for Boer. And one of the fiercest of those British citizens who asked Fraser's and his followers' punishment was that sallow-faced, narrow-chested Portuguese whose wagon train was carrying us back to Cloutsie. Fraser's movement had thwarted his plans; had destroyed his very good chances of trebling his already tremendous fortune; and he, we knew, would use every means in his power to make those persons who had dared to act against him feel his strong hand.

As the Honourable Charlie Phillips said one night in the Cloutsie Club:

"Why, there are peers who have had their debts paid through Tirwin's tips; men in the Government itself, whose convictions, wavering, would feel inclined to do as Tirwin bade them."

I have said myself further back that I believed Tirwin had cultivated Fraser's favour to a certain degree, counting on his success.

But when he began to see what he had lost, a dull desire for vengeance became fiercely poignant, and he was the one of the great financial leaders in South Africa who stood out openly denouncing the expedition. Contrary to his usual subtle methods, he now adopted those of open aggressiveness. You can imagine how his popularity increased; yet how he was lauded to the skies by those in England who were opposed to what they called a "steal"; by those with fortunes or reputations to make; by the great British bourgeois, who was afraid there would be so much agitation as to hurt his interests; by lords and gentlemen who believed his way; by socialists, and reformers, and a screaming partisan press.

Now let me tell how at Cloutsie I had occasion to pull this same gentleman's nose. I was seated in the club when a servant brought word that a Bela boy wished to see me outside. And there, as I hurried out, was the person for whom I would have done the most in the world after Fraser—no, I know

now, before Fraser—Maisie Halton; and she asked me to walk on with her, and I saw she was trembling about something, so I began to soothe her as if she were a little child, and she said suddenly:

"It's that man Tirwin; and papa in his position can't act against him."

"What has he dared to do, Maisie?" I cried.

"I didn't want to tell MacIvor, though I saw him to-day." And she blushed prettily. "It troubles me because people gossip about my going there so much."

She meant to the jail of Cloutsie, where the prisoners were then confined by the governmental order; although comfortably lodged, they had no liberty at that time.

"Why, I say, let them gossip, it's between you and me, and," with a toss of her head, "I always have done what I wish. I didn't tell him that papa objects, too; that would worry him. But he is more to me than papa—than all—and so——"

"There's a way out of it," I suggested,

when she blushed, but did not answer. What I said seemed to have hurt me myself; it suddenly revealed to me that she had become to me more than Fraser himself. Well, we were silent for some moments, until I broke out, in a rather hoarse tone, I think:

"And Tirwin?"

"It was last night after dinner, and he followed me on to the balcony. You know I detest him. But he began—— Well, I cut him short with, 'You know, Mr. Tirwin, I am betrothed to Mr. Fraser.' Then he said that it was for Mr. Fraser's interests that I should help him out—not only his, but my cousin's, Jim Willing's, who is in as bad a fix as the others. He went on that punishment meant for them at the best life imprisonment, while at the worst execution. But if he should declare that he, Tirwin, on investigation had changed his opinions, that the expedition was for the good of England, why, the opinions of many influential persons would be changed. And he said he would make that change if I—I would marry him."

"Why, he dared!" I cried. And then, after a moment, "He must love you a deal, or else he wouldn't have put himself in the ridiculous colours of a villain of melodrama."

"He knew too much to bring in papa's indebtedness to him. Papa wouldn't tolerate that. But what did I do, you are asking. I said: 'Mr. Tirwin, you have gone mad. I can explain your wild talk in no other way. But I shall never speak to you again, and you must never speak to me.' And I turned and left him. Later I grew angrier, and I told papa, and he said, 'The man is just in love with you, Maisie.' 'Yes,' said I, 'but it's an insult!' 'A worm may love an angel, Maisie girl,' papa said. 'So far as your heart goes, you can have your own way. Nor can Tirwin change me. I like Fraser, though I think his position very unfortunate. But if you don't mind, I'd rather you wouldn't insist on me saying much to Tirwin about this. Yet I will, I will.' And he went to Tirwin against my wish, and he told him what he thought. And Tirwin, seeing he had gone too

far, apologized, and tried to speak to me, but I looked at him without seeing him. And last night I couldn't sleep for thinking of it all. He didn't want to antagonize papa, though he has a hold on him, for he thinks through papa's interest is the only possible hold he can get on me. Nor did he want such a thing published; it would hurt him. I saw that. But supposing he does carry out that threat? Oh, what if he should! I couldn't tell Mac; it would worry him."

"My private opinion," I said, "is that your telling him would result in Tirwin being shot down like any other dog. No, you hadn't better. I'll arrange it with him, and he's not likely to bother you."

So I comforted her as best I could, and I think I left her feeling better. And I went back to the club. (You haven't if you're leisurely much else to do in Cloutsie than to sit in the club and drink and gossip and spin yarns—that is, if you don't play polo nor go in for the social, things for which I had no particular taste at that time, being too much

absorbed.) The fellow had forgotten himself; had lost his self-control; had acted, as I said, like the simple old-fashioned villain in melodrama. But he had dared; he had dared. And Maisie Halton was to me the dearest person in the world; not after Fraser, I have said I had found out. I worked myself up into a fine frenzy of rage, when, as luck, good or bad, would have it, who should pass along the street outside but Tirwin and some other men.

Now you know by this time that I am usually a calm man, so I must have been in a very considerable rage so to have forgotten myself. I left my seat by the window and rushed out into the street. They were walking toward me. About three feet before them I paused. Tirwin, as you doubtless know, has a very prominent hooked nose. I met him squarely, caught that nose, and pulled it; there on the street, mind you, in full view of the Cloutsie Club, I tweaked the nose of the possessor of fifty million pounds sterling. When I had finished he stepped back, pale

and green with rage, perhaps terror; I reassured him as to the latter.

"My sentiments, that's all. I am so much stronger a man than you, Tirwin, that I don't want to knock you down."

"Do you know who I am, d'ye know?" he cried in his accented English.

"Oh, well, I am ready to measure conclusions with you any way you designate. Have me arrested for assault. I'll pay my fine and take my other medicine. You are at liberty to try fisticuffs should you prefer. But, as the stronger, I won't insist on that."

So leaving them, I went back into the club and ordered a cigar, and as I smoked it men came around and congratulated me, though declaring I'd probably get a year for it. But I didn't talk about it myself; I let them. I felt satisfied with myself; what I had done couldn't hurt my friends any more than he was trying to hurt them as it had been before. An American tourist, insignificant, even if he were Fraser's friend, had but expressed his sentiment; that was all, and

the sentiment, too, of most men in South Africa.

As I sat there, Griffin of the London Enterprise called me aside.

"I have cabled it," said he.

"Oh, have you?" I said. "There'll be more of it," I added.

"Arrest and trial," he said. "No, I don't believe so, for the simple reason that that will keep it before the public for some time, and Tirwin won't want it gossipped about any longer than he possibly can avoid."

"I didn't think of that."

"I know you didn't, but you are entirely safe. He will try to crush you in other ways. You must keep your eyes wide open. But to another matter: you know the Enterprise has supported Fraser through thick and thin, as you Yankees say?"

"Yes, I know that well, Griffin."

"And we have charged that Tirwin had concessions from the Boers that practically give him and his associates all Nitara as a private property."

"Yes," said I; "but the other side has declared these statements lies. And you can't prove that they are not."

"If we could get hold of the correspondence on the subject we could prove that the one powerful man in South Africa who is against Fraser and the others had an infamous object, which leads him to be revengeful. If we can prove that, I'll assure you that, with the general British sentiment of 'anything, everything for the Empire,' the sentences against our friends will be only nominal."

"Of course you could. Any considerable sentence then would lead to riots, I believe, and would overturn the government."

"Well," said the correspondent with a keen glance about and in a very low voice, "as Fraser's friend, I can trust you: I know where those originals are, but I don't know how the devil to get at them."

"Where are they?"

"In the safest place in the world, so far as he is concerned—a safety-deposit box in London, to which he alone has access."

"How did you find it out?"

"Great men, as well as little ones, have their weaknesses. Tirwin is one of those men who will hurt and grind a subordinate. He has a private secretary, Isidor Goldstein, a keen, shrewd person, whom he implicitly trusts, but who hates him worse than a snake. It seems he came between Isidor and a woman he was interested in, which added another important grievance to the long series of abuses the secretary had. Tirwin considers this man's spirit utterly broken; that to the end of time he will kiss the hand that lashes him. But Isidor Goldstein wants revenge, you understand; he has the same flesh and blood and weakness as the rest of us. So one night he came to my quarters, and told me what would hurt Tirwin mightily, and incidentally strengthen my position with the Enterprise. But there's your problem. Did you ever hear of any one getting into such a box in one of the strongest and most prudent banks of the world. No second person opens that box, but just Tirwin's word or Tirwin's signature.

I won't become a forger about it, you can rest assured. But if I could get those concessions, and see 'em printed on the first page of the Enterprise, I should die happy."

And his eyes flashed, and he looked as if this was the dearest wish he that moment had in the world.

He sat down again, drawing his chair closer to mine.

"Now you know I am going to London on this case, as a witness, you know. And I propose, Barton, to get into that box."

"As you yourself said, how the devil are you?"

"I am going to do it," he insisted doggedly. "And you, as the only other person in the world knowing about it, besides the secretary, must put your mind on it."

"I'll do that gladly," said I; "but I never was very good at prize puzzles."

CHAPTER XI.

A SENTIMENTAL AFFAIR IN THE JAIL AT CLOUTSIE.

WELL, the scandal of myself and the millionaire's nose was a very pretty one, I assure you. The Cloutsie Gazette retailed it next morning, and the Enterprise had a real beat on it in London. I, of course, expected the arrest for assault; I, indeed, expected anything. But, as it proved, Tirwin wanted to shut it up; Griffin had been entirely right in his estimate of the man; the scandal was great enough, and by not calling down the law on me Tirwin could pose more or less—and he ever was a *poseur*—as a person quite brutally abused, but who, knowing how high public opinion ran on the most interesting topics in South Africa, or perhaps the world, was

content to pardon the man who in the heat of opinion pulled his nose; equally, of course, he ran the danger of being held a mean-spirited fellow. The chief reason for his course, however, I consider to have been, as Griffin had said, that he wanted to have the matter quieted.

Oh, how Maisie Halton rated me about it! Not that she objected to the act, I think, but rather that she feared some serious harm would follow. I told her I always had obeyed my feelings, and never had been the least bit politic all my life, and the leopard can't change his spots.

Fraser, too, scolded me a bit, although not knowing the real reason behind my action.

"Oh, I had to do it, you know," I retorted.

"You are, Jack, I believe, the most violently faithful friend a man ever had," he said, laughing. "Now there's another matter."

"Well," said I, "well?" For he paused a long time after this beginning.

"It's this," he said. "I can't keep Maisie away, and God knows I would have her visit me. It's against my heart to think of her staying away. But people gossip—and—— What do you think of my marrying her now, here? She wants to follow me to England; she can in no other way that I can see."

"Do it, do it!" I said quickly. "It's different between you and her than between most couples."

"It's just that dream we had together, if you will have it a dream, of having known each other before. It makes it different, doesn't it? It is just as if she and I had been parts of each other forever since the beginning."

"I know, I know," I said. "What a jolly old mystic you are anyway, and with all your capacity for rapid action that isn't the least mystical. What does Halton say about it?"

"Well, he agrees; he says Maisie will follow me to England whether he will or no, and he says that's positively the only way. It's all right so far as he is concerned. But

is it best for her, I want to know, when perhaps I have before me a felon's career? Isn't it selfish? Isn't it wrong?"

"I think," said I, "that in any other case almost it might be entirely wrong. But, as you yourself say, your and her relation to each other is so different. The way you rushed into it; that hallucination you have in common; for, as a man more or less sensible, I must say that it appears to be an hallucination. If I said anything different about it, I should be held as mad as a March hare. But, strange as it is, you two are two mad March hares, and, whatever happens to either, the other will still be as madly faithful. So decide it in your own way."

And it was decided in that way, and Cloutsie gossipped about it. But nothing was too good for Fraser in Cloutsie's opinion. And I, when I had given my advice, sat in a corner of that club and felt as lonely as, say, the Wandering Jew. What a dull fool of a man a bachelor is anyway when he's beyond the years of "your gay bachelor"! But I'd

rather be a dull fool of a bachelor than not to marry the right girl. And the only girl I ever could have married, I declare, was she who shortly became Mrs. Fraser of Glencoe. They rather hastened the ceremony, I believe, because we heard through some source that the order might come any moment for the prisoners to be carried to England.

I saw much of Maisie in those days, when she was flushed and happy, and only worried about what might happen in England to her Fraser. Yet, absorbed as she was with him, she was ever doing unselfish things for me and for her father. She was, indeed, the most considerate creature that ever lived. As for the fright Tirwin had thrown her in, I kept her reassured. We never told Fraser a word about it, for the very good reason I have mentioned. I think he would have thought no more of breaking the Portuguese's neck than he would have of killing a snake. And, by the way, I think my performance with Tirwin's nose had one good effect: it drove him out of Cloutsie. He left the very next

week for Cape Town, and then, if we did hear he had gone to England, it did not trouble me particularly. Let him do what he could.

Now about this time a queer thing happened. I say queer, because it changed the whole aspect of the affair. Such coincidences do sometimes happen in novels, but rarely in real life. The head of the family of Glencoe, as everybody knows, is the earl of that name. Lord Fraser of Glencoe at this time was a very old man, but the line seemed hardly likely to fail. In the first place, there was Lord John Cleveden, the heir, who was childless to be sure, but whose cousin, Robert Fraser, Master of Glencoe, had two children. But by the strangest course of circumstances Robert Fraser, his wife, and two children were lost at sea in the unfortunate sinking of the ship Hilda off Bremerhaven, one of the most fearful sea casualities during this century. That happened while we were in Nitara, and we knew nothing about it until long after, nor did it appear likely that Mac-

Ivor Fraser had a chance of the succession, because John Cleveden was a young, vigorous man, who might marry any day. But as we trekked across the veldts of Belaland from Victoria, Nitara to Cloutsie, Lord Glencoe died in his bed of an apoplectic stroke, leaving Fraser the heir; and one day we heard at the Cloutsie Club—and discussed the situation excitedly—that the new earl had broken his neck after the hounds in Kent. The greatest of the line—whom his cousins had utterly ignored in his calamities in India and in Africa—became the eleventh Lord Fraser of Glencoe—an event quite significant under the circumstances; for, though the peerage of Glencoe carried little property with it, it put the raider of Nitara among the peers if the case itself and his accomplices in the crime should be tried by ordinary court. We in the Cloutsie Club discussed what difference this might or not make in the case before we remembered that the daughter of the administrator soon would become Lady Glencoe.

I remember clearly every detail of that

affair as if it were yesterday. Oh, never was Cloutsie so excited! never were the women so talkative and interested! never since the beginning of the world had there been such a romantic affair! (I wonder what they would have said had they known all about it that I did?)

For my own part, I declare there never was a prettier, more winsome bride, though it was all done in the Cloutsie jail. The bridesmaid was poor little Willing's *fiancée;* her eyes were red, thinking that nothing of this kind could happen to her, since her family wouldn't have it until Jim Willing had been tried and acquitted—until, in short, he should be through with it. And then there was the poor, sad widow of Michael Bagley, and there was Halton, and there was John Barton, who is telling you this. As for Fraser of Glencoe, he never looked better and stronger and manlier, and you know my opinion of the bride. I have stated that too often for you not to know.

The very next day, I think, the news was

brought that the prisoner was ordered to England. I never shall forget my last talk with Fraser; he had said his last words to Maisie, and now I spoke to him:

"Mrs. Bagley is going to England with her. She has no women relatives there, and Mrs. Bagley is going back anyway. They will take a quiet little house in Kensington until it's over one way or another. Jack, will you, who always do so well by me and mine, will you go with them to keep up her spirits a bit when she needs it?"

"Why, Mac," I said, "of course I will."

The prisoners were to be carried across by a troop ship. They were still held close prisoners, for England was keeping the necessary attitude of being bent on punishing the men who created the disorder in Nitara. And what their sentence would be depended on how much, how far, the foreign demand might be for it, while all the time the lion kept growling, "But I have my paws on this Nitara, and I don't propose to take them off."

All the women in Nitara came around and cried over Lady Glencoe, I believe, including, of course, my pretty compatriot, Mrs. Lindsay, and then we were started on the train of the Cloutsie and Cape Town road, and she was looking forward, for he had gone before us. If she were sorry at parting with her father, her duty lay with MacIvor Fraser. As for me, I was like some faithful dog, I will say myself, and as one I am willing to serve these two to the end.

In the long voyage up we talked much together, and, though there was always an undercurrent of seriousness about Fraser, there were times when she was even light-hearted, when girlishness asserted itself, and she was the same person who had stood that day, before the beginning of all this, on the polo grounds at Cloutsie. We walked the deck under the stars. We conjectured and planned about the trial. And I found her wonderfully clear-headed about it. She seemed to have studied it, and sifted all the probabilities, and even all the possibilities.

"If we could win over Mr. Little" (the great journalist, you know), "or Mr. Brandeth" (the Unionist leader in the House at that time), "or Lord Stavers;" and she would go on stating, indeed, the exact necessary steps to be taken in that campaign. I told her, I remember, of what Griffin had said of the papers in the safe box in London, which, if we only knew and could publish, would disarm our one most violent enemy, and she agreed entirely with Griffin. Oh, if we only could get those papers!

Now let me say here of Tirwin that, while he himself was a Jew, the many honourable and splendid Jews who have done so much to advance South Africa were always against him; he was never popular with his own race, whatever the political nationality of that race might be. I must say it here in all frankness: There are many, many of us, quite as unscrupulous as he in the pursuit of gain or spite. But I don't suppose it can much matter to a race always so well able to defend itself.

So having said so much to prove I am not narrow nor uncharitable, let me continue the voyage, or rather end it in the little house we took in Kensington, over which Mrs. Bagley was to preside. I took my old quarters in Clarges Street. We had time to get completely settled before the arrival of the Scotia with the prisoners. And I went about a bit in my old haunts, and tried to find what the public opinion might be. But that, after all, was best expressed by the cheers the crowd gave the prisoners as they passed through the street; such cheers as Dr. Jameson had received on a similar occasion. Maisie, in a window on the line of march, was looking for Fraser, and Fraser, knowing what window to look at, looked into Maisie's eyes. Then the crowd, hearing this was Lady Glencoe, and knowing the whole romantic story, began to cheer her, and she flushed and gave a little cry of pleasure.

"The people, at least, are with us," she said.

I might have told her that an English

crowd is always with a man who, rightfully or wrongfully, does things for England, particularly if he wins a battle or a single square foot of territory.

CHAPTER XII.

OF THE DAYS WHEN WE WAITED IN LONDON.

We used to walk, in those uncertain days, leaving the cab waiting, through the stretches of Green Park, which we were very fond of, and she made me talk of Fraser as I had known him in the old Oxford days, of which she seemed to feel herself a part, from that fancy they held together as of a real experience. And I told her of uproarious boyish days, of the things we had done, of our fargone experiences, which seemed to me like dreams, vague, unreal, and she would listen rapt on my words, while I would end by saying that I was only an American student; when at first among those young fellows—it was years ago, you know—they looked on me as a creature who was expected to say "I

guess" in every sentence. (Among other things, I remember I defended the use of guess as a verb, saying it was old English, and quite as good usage as "I fancy" when they derided me.) But she did not care so much for my personal experience. She was readier to hear that Glencoe was our ideal then; I had no reason to exaggerate it in telling her that. For if life had given the big fellow a certain austerity, he then could be light and boyish enough, and quite the best of the stories I had to tell her of him were of that side of his character—of the jokes we had played on each other, of our escapades together, of a week I had with him in Scotland, of how we used to run up to London, and the wonderful place it still seemed to me then; for I was always looking at it through the eyes of Dickens or Thackeray, which rather amused Maisie. For she thought that story books were just story books, and had nothing real about them, even when they described real places. For she was still, though Lady Glencoe, with delightful womanliness, much

just the ordinary healthy, clear-eyed English girl I had met that day at polo in Cloutsie. The English, you know, while having produced some of the great masters of imaginary work, are not themselves at all an imaginative people; or, at any rate, the qualities of the imagination are not so evident with them as with those of us who are their cousins over the seas. But Maisie was best in those simple things that go for womanliness, not in matter of erudition or in bookishness of any kind, where, as I say, she was lacking. But in outdoor things she was the jolliest companion; we had some delightful little canters together through the Rotten Row, if you can call riding in town at all a sport. I say she was jolly; she was in those little restful times we had together. Every day she visited Fraser, of course, and on those excursions he was the main topic; she was planning and thinking for him. We talked of him as we moved among the monuments of the Abbey, or as we sat at the play, or as we dined at Richmond; for we did all these things quite like

American tourists, with good Mrs. Bagley somewhere close in the background.

But Lady Glencoe was too prominent a person just then to have much time for herself or for me. As the wife of the principal raider, ladies whose younger sons had been with Fraser at Nitara came and commiserated with her, or asked her opinion as to how it was to turn out for the Honourable Reggie or Lord Adolphus. And there were other more formal visits she had, the wife of the new head of the house of Glencoe. And then there would come her schoolgirl friends, for, though she hadn't a half dozen relatives in England, she had been educated there, of course, not in the colonies, where Halton had spent long years of service. So between this and that she was a rather busy woman, and the excursions we had together were not very numerous.

I, for my part, was kept busy enough planning as best I could in my little way. I thought I might do something, though an alien. Then, thinking of it all, I used to

have moments of dull anger, because Maisie and Fraser were so dear to me, because those behind him—he must have had them, or else he never would have undertaken it—chose to make him the scapegoat of it all, because the Government was secretly pleased by the conquest of Nitara. For it appeared about this time that it had been decided that Nitara should belong to those who held it. The raiders had ousted the Boers by force, and the point of the whole quarrel now was whether it was rightfully the property of the Transvaal Republic, which really had been possessed of it at the time of the raid, or of England, who now held it. I don't know about the legal pros and cons, not being versed in that sort of thing, so I suppose to a lawyer that my statements may appear a bit incoherent. But that is the way it stood, and now the question was as to who possessed it. England claimed stoutly that she did before, because there were so many British citizens there, and now she did, in fact. But the fact that tickled the fancy of the great British

public was that if Fraser hadn't made his raid, in the view of the international decision, England never would have had any claim at all. The raiders' popularity kept increasing from day to day, and Tirwin and the Government were not at all popular.

One morning Griffin came to my lodgings while I was still over my eggs.

"Well," said I, "glad to see you. How about those papers in the safety-deposit box?"

"If I could only get 'em," he said, "if I could only get 'em!" And his eyes had the greed of a miser's.

"I saw your friend the millionaire pass the Piccadilly Club last night. I think he saw me in the window. He didn't give me a particularly inviting smile."

"He remembered the nose," said Griffin, with one of his hearty laughs. "I wish to the dickens that I could get 'em."

"The papers again—that will deprive our enemies of their strong card—the South African patriot, Mr. Tirwin."

"I can see but one way," said he absently.

"That's to force him to sign an order letting me, or you, or somebody, go there and open it."

"I don't see how you're to do that."

"There's only one way—to frighten him."

"How?"

"He's a house on Half-Moon Street."

"What of that?"

"To burglarize that house—to enter it feloniously after he is in bed, say, and make him give us the signature."

"Hum, you're likely to end a felon, Griffin," laughed I. "Your interest in this thing seems to have made you crazy."

"Perhaps it has, perhaps it has."

"Can't you set a trap for him somewhere?" I went on. "Can't you get him to call at some address—decoy him—and then say, 'Mr. Tirwin, you've got to—you must—change your position regarding Fraser of Glencoe.'"

"He's too shrewd a fish for that boy's play." He fell to laughing. "We are both

applying the experience of penny-dreadful heroes to real life. But I shall—I will do it—in some way!"

"What's the general opinion to-day?"

"That they're bound to get a heavy sentence," he said. "They can't very well avoid giving it to them."

And as those days dragged on we were not able to change our opinions. Only Maisie herself kept up any strong hope; she would not change, whatever was said: Lord Glencoe must be, in the very nature of justice, exonerated; she believed, in her girlish way, in human justice. But you know there were different views of the justice of the case; there were our own opinions, because our friends were concerned, and the opinions of those who held anything just that increased British power or territory, and there were the many, many others differing from us.

There followed the long anxious days of the trial, when the charges were made; and the defence was put in the words of Mr. Blanding: "We have but one answer—'Her

Majesty's Empire.'" However, as a foreigner or a Briton, you may regard that statement, there seemed to be the whole case—"Her Majesty's Empire." You know too well the story of those days: what happened in the court; how the debates ran excitedly in the Commons, the Lords; how the public discussion went. How the principal prisoner, Lord Glencoe, put on the stand, said: "We waited for the Government to act; there was no action. We took the matter in our own hands; that's the whole situation. As for those behind us, if there be any, we who did it are willing to take the responsibility." And these words, so simply, decisively put, raised a sort of tempest of approval, as well as of disapproval from the other side, who charged it was all a business speculation on the part of the Belaland Company, and one which was disapproved of by such well-known directors of the Belaland Company as Mr. Tirwin. Tirwin, put on the stand, told his story, saying that from the first he had been against it, acknowledging that he had sent across the border for

Nicholas Boeder; posing, in fine, as a kind of far-sighted philanthropist, who had foreseen these dreadful consequences very clearly indeed.

Maisie sat each day and watched it all, and her simple, honest English beauty made her the heroine of London of that time.

I remember one day when I called on the great Mr. Berner, who had grown old and haggard. (He stood, you know, in the Belaland Company for much the same position as that held by Mr. Rhodes in the other complication.)

"Lord Glencoe is a very brave man," he said. "We all owe him much; England owes him much."

Then his eyes lit, and he said: "You know that there's this little light on the situation: Russia is claiming a big space of territory on the Persian frontier. If we concede it, she will support us in Nitara."

"You think it will go that way?" I asked eagerly.

"If we only could prove Tirwin's self-in-

terest in the position he has taken," the great colonial went on.

"How can that be done?" said I, remembering Griffin's opinion on the same question.

"I don't know; but there's the point—if we could."

"If we could!" I cried.

"At least we don't let them talk so much as they did about that old Barkur affair. We can retort always, Well, look at North Belaland; notice the square miles Lord Fraser of Glencoe has added to the Empire! They can't answer that."

"No," I said, "decidedly not."

But that was all the light I could get that day, until, about five o'clock, there came a note from Griffin, saying he wished me to dine with him. I knew that he wished to see me on only one subject, so I replied hastily that I would. As my cab drew up at his lodgings, he was there on the curb.

"To Mrs. Blanfield's," he said, naming a number in Park Lane.

"Where have I heard that name?"

"Mrs. Blanfield is a widow," said he, not very definitely.

"I don't think I have the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance," I went on; "not that I am unacquainted with widows."

"Probably not. Yet you may. She's still a very pretty woman, a very rich woman; a woman with a past, it's said, and still we are bachelors." He sighed.

"I don't know that I care particularly to meet new people at my age," I remonstrated.

"Wait," he said, "wait, I tell you. I have told her I was going to bring you. You are the only person in the world who knows about the secretary's confession."

"This bears on that?" I cried.

"Yes, I have a clew. But I want a witness to hear what this really charming woman has to say, and she has not objected to having you there."

"This is very kind of her," said I. A moment after I added, "What a wonderful fellow you are, Griffin!"

"My profession has become a sort of passion with me," he said modestly.

"Now I will tell you a story," he said as we drove along. "Years ago, many perhaps—— But here's a bar. Have your cabby stop. We can wait, for we have an hour before dinner; the time she put was eight, I think."

So we found ourselves comfortably seated for a few moments, and this hero of many journalistic adventures went on with his story of Mrs. Blanfield.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW MRS. BLANFIELD DINED MR. TIRWIN.

"I DON'T know why I stopped here; we might have driven on through the park and talked it all over. But in some way this particular window is a habit of mine, and I like to sit here at this hour of a June evening and watch the carriages and the cabs and the crowds of dinner-dressed people coming and going. I sit here like a fellow in a box. It's an endless play, isn't it? and I suppose I have been so long writing up people and their affairs, looking for what is dramatic and, better, dramatic news, that I—that we all in this trade find life a big continuous drama, where one act leads to another.

"But do you know, Jack Barton, it sometimes happens that if you think intently on

a subject—perhaps it always happens so—you will arrive near its solution; possibly when all your faculties are keyed up to a certain tension you see all its probabilities. Any detective on a case will tell you that, and how the merest chance, the most extraordinary coincidence will present itself."

"You don't mean that you think you have found the way to solve your prize puzzle, to get the concessions locked in Tirwin's box?"

"I have found a way," he said; "but whether or no it may succeed depends on what happens at dinner to-night. To begin with, let me tell you how I met that interesting woman, Mrs. Blanfield.

"A long time ago, when I was first sent on a war commission by the Enterprise—when I was a very young man, and the Enterprise took me because I knew the Balkans and they couldn't get Archibald Forbes—I was on my way down there on train, somewhere between Vienna and Buda-Pesth. I had stopped over at Vienna to await a wire, which contained

some important instructions, and so had lost that day's Oriental express. But I thought I would push on to Buda-Pesth, because that brought me so much nearer the frontier, where my chance of distinction was. I was tremendously ambitious in those days, and thought that to get a piece of news was as fine a thing as to inherit a million, or to be a social leader, or to make a great discovery or invention, or to paint a good picture, or to write a popular novel; which I then hoped to do. I had one chance of getting to Buda-Pesth that afternoon, and that by a troop train—the road was cleared for trains carrying Austrian soldiers south. I had known in London the young Count Von Hobenstein, who commanded the military supply bureau in Vienna, so I went boldly to him, and he was anxious to oblige me, and wanted to know why I hadn't gone on by the express. But I explained as well as I could, that it had been uncertain whether I was to proceed to Servia or instead strike out to Prague and the Russian frontier for another purpose. My explanation was sat-

isfactory, and I was going out with my pass when in the anteroom I ran across a very pretty young woman, who came forward.

"'You are English; you know Count Von Hobenstein. I must be in Buda-Pesth by the earliest possible hour. I wish to go down at once to my brother, who is very ill there. I must go, I will go! There is no other train under three hours.'

"I told her I didn't see how it was to be done; that I had only done it because Count Von Hobenstein had admitted the privileges of the correspondent of the Enterprise. And then she came toward me, with a sort of tragic intensity, and she said:

"'You must try.'

"I have said she was an extremely pretty woman, haven't I? Hobenstein saw her, and, as there was an extra compartment reserved for some functionaries who were going down on a later train, Mrs. Blanfield and I journeyed that day together on the Austrian transport train over the plains of Hungary. She was devoted to the brother who lay ill there—

who, in fact, died then—and she never forgot that particular attention of mine, for such she chose to consider it. The acquaintance begun then has kept up through various degrees of man and woman's friendship. I never have gone in much for the social side of life, but there's a house not far from Park Lane where I am always sure of being received, where I always go. When Blanfield died, she—he was much older—began that course of charitable contributions to which she since has devoted herself and the Blanfield millions. Well, there's the prologue of the story, which will be continued to-night."

"And our prize puzzle?" I asked. "How does this come in?"

"Tirwin is to dine there with us."

"The man I insulted in Cloutsie? I am to dine with that chap, Griffin; I'm not particularly delighted."

"Well, well," my friend went on, "I want, above all, to have the Enterprise publish those papers. You are the one man in my secret; I wanted a man witness rather

than Mrs. Blanfield or her mother, Mrs. Durant."

"I don't see through it at all," I cried after a moment's consideration. "How can Mrs. Blanfield open Tirwin's strong box, or make him open it?"

"She can't; we can't unless our surprise works exactly. We have keys to two of Tirwin's weaknesses. He has, if you don't know it, an inordinate social ambition. He isn't so wise as was Mr. Barnato, who condoned social ambitions, and quietly jeered at 'em, and proved himself in more ways than one a very good fellow."

"He lost his head over Lady Glencoe," I said, meaning Tirwin; but then I remembered I had no right to go further into that story; none at all, for Griffin did not suspect, I think, the real reason for my insult to Tirwin in Cloutsie. He thought it was simply because of my sympathy with Fraser.

"Did he? Well, I thought that might be possible," the newspaper man said shrewdly. "He's a bit weak about women, as wit-

ness how he excited the enmity of his secretary. But his attentions to Mrs. Blanfield are coolly calculated. Fifty millions sterling can do anything almost in London; a fellow who's shrewd and cool can become a peer of the realm on a lot less and no other qualification. But to have a position in London Tirwin feels he ought to have a wife; he doesn't fly too high; just up to my friend Mrs. Blanfield. Her position is sure. Can he attract this clever lady—as he might so many—by the thought of the almost boundless power of such a fortune? She's a clever woman, I say. She makes this South African celebrity contribute to her charities. She has written that she wishes to see him to-night on account of one of them."

"Yet to entrap him in some way?"

"My dear Barton," Griffin cried, "no aspersions of this dear charming lady. Your friends are more to her than Tirwin, who is just one of the episodes of a very busy, a complicated London life. And, besides that, she has some one near who has become her

friend, whom she believes Tirwin has injured. It is strange how I happened to find it out," he went on. "Coincidence, chance, accident, some labour; there you have life. But come, we must go."

"I don't know how to face that fellow," I said, squirming about, as we were again rolling along Piccadilly.

"Let's see how he will do it. It will be a polite nod, one of those congealing sort of recognitions," Griffin went on with a little laugh. "Now, I tell you, I will wager you the Enterprise will print those Boer concessions to Tirwin day after to-morrow."

"Think what he will lose by retreating from his position! Think of all his social ambitions destroyed!"

"Think what he will lose by not doing as we wish!"

"I don't know about that."

"You will see," said Griffin.

But the first I was to see, after the lackeys and the hall, was this very interesting lady. She might have been forty perhaps. She re-

ceived us with admirable graciousness. I saw she was a person always well controlled, ever self-contained. I appreciated what Griffin had declared, that she was an immensely clever person. In the background was a little dried old lady, who wore an immense necklace of diamonds and rubies, our hostess's mother and chaperon, Mrs. Durant. While we exchanged the amenities, without Mrs. Blanfield once referring to the subject in hand as Griffin had outlined it, the man announced "Mr. Tirwin."

Now it may be that I have done this really great financier an injustice; I appreciate his astuteness, present and past; I appreciate the adroitness with which he changed defeat to victory. Just as Fraser of Glencoe was the master of open action, he was the master of the devious ways of intrigue and business transaction; this narrow-chested, sallow-faced man was truly a most remarkable person, and is indeed to this very last day. Now in his plain black coat—and he wore no jewellery or decoration—his shining, uncertain black

eyes caught sight of me. He was not particularly troubled by Griffin's presence, but that of a man who had given him so public an insult must have been peculiarly aggravating. Yet he did not so much as show this feeling by look or nod; he inclined his head at my name, that was all, and he turned to the chattering hostess.

And we went into dinner.

Never, I think, was an odder dinner company, yet Tirwin's ready retorts, his wit—I, indeed, had not seen it displayed in our association on the plains of Belaland—startled me. That table, indeed, was a flow of talk, not the least of which was contributed by Mrs. Durant, who appeared to have known every celebrity of every kind of the century, who had the gossip of generations at her tongue's end.

So we passed on almost to the last course, I, I think, sitting silent among their chatter. As for Tirwin, he had not noticed me again, save after the first slight nod. He treated me and the insult I had given him at Cloutsie as of no importance whatever, which—shall

I confess it—rather provoked me. But this Portuguese person was one of the world's great intellects of his time and day; any purpose he had was above his own feelings, save in a few instances, as say in the case of Maisie Halton; those exceptions, perhaps, proved the character I have tried to describe.

Mrs. Blanfield had directed the talk to the matter of adventure, and Griffin, one of the best talkers of my acquaintance, had told many stories from his rich and varied career.

"I want to tell you of an experience I had lately," said the hostess, "not that I can outdo you, Mr. Griffin, or you, Mr. Tirwin, with your tales of the contrasts afforded by the gold and diamond fields of South Africa. But it was interesting."

She stopped for a moment, her eyes on Tirwin. Mrs. Durant leaned forward with a vague air of expectation.

"I have among my servants a good faithful Frenchwoman. She has been with me twelve years. Her story seems to me one of the saddest I ever heard.

"It seems that about fifteen years ago her husband was one of two accountants of a French milliner in Brighton; there were Therese Bidoux's husband, and his associate, Benoni Lemin, I think—a Spaniard, or Italian, or something or other."

Tirwin's face, which we were all watching, for I felt the climax was approaching, may have twitched, but then it became, as before, perfectly immobile.

"They were all very young. The Bidouxs had two little children, however; Lemin was a bachelor, I believe. The milliner's in Brighton was a large establishment. By falsifying the accounts, through collusion, it seemed, a considerable amount was stolen by these accountants. The theft was found out; Lemin avoided arrest by saying he could show it in Bidoux's books; that he had known it, but had tried to shield his friend. Bidoux was arrested, and swore he was innocent. And then suddenly Lemin disappeared. When he had gone, it was found he had lied; that he had persuaded Bidoux to make entries in his

own books, and that he had carried with him some three hundred pounds in money. But this evidence came too late. Bidoux—one of those excitable little Provençals—had killed himself."

For a moment the hostess paused, and we only heard the butler's steps.

"I heard—it was called to my attention, I forget how—that the widow and the children were penniless. I sent for the woman. She interested me. She has been with me ever since, and her children are now at school. The boy has a turn for mechanics, and I am so educating him; the girl is being trained as a nurse. But that's neither here nor there."

"Marion is always doing that sort of thing," Mrs. Durant piped up in her shrill tones.

"And the other—Lemin?" asked Tirwin, but in a very low voice. "Was he ever caught?"

"Never, never. And Mme. Bidoux declared she saw him three days ago. Though the occurrence was fifteen years ago, and he

wore a beard then, she declared she recognised him."

"She declared she recognised him!" joined in Mrs. Durant.

"Jorkins," said Mrs. Blanfield to the butler, "you may leave the room."

This seemed to have been a signal, for as Jorkins went out a faded woman, neatly dressed in black, entered by the other door. Her dark eyes were bent on Tirwin, as we had expected, as you knew they would if you may have followed this scene so far, and she said:

"Benoni Lemin!"

Tirwin rose from his seat, white and still, for he had seen a ghost.

"Therese," came Mrs. Blanfield's voice, "you remember your promise."

But what had become of Tirwin's self-control, which I have insisted on so long; out of his past came it all—those young Jew accountants in Brighton, and what he had done—what he had done—when he had sold his soul; a man's life, a woman's happiness. His

pretence, everything fell away; there was at that moment no denial at all.

"In God's name, Therese Bidoux," he said, "I thought you were dead!" Then he cried quickly: "Woman, you can—you could have had a hundred thousand pounds if you wished it—if you wish it."

"Go, Therese!" said her mistress from the table, and with a sort of sob the woman passed out, having herself not uttered a word.

"Mr. Tirwin," said Mrs. Blanfield, rising, "we will leave the rest of this to Mr. Griffin. You will excuse us now. I wanted to commit you before these people. I didn't know whether it could be done. Mr. Griffin said it couldn't when I told him of Mme. Bidoux recognising you."

"Stop, Mrs. Blanfield!" said the Portuguese, almost commandingly. "I have a word to say now."

"Well?" the lady retorted.

"If I ever regretted anything, it was that. Yet, if it were a crime, out of that fifteen hun-

dred pounds capital taken to South Africa came the development of properties that feed thousands of mouths.

"I acknowledge this past," he went on, with a certain dignity; "I acknowledge that to-day there is in England a criminal case against Benoni Lemin. But the two, Benoni Lemin and Simon Tirwin, are distinct, I tell you, madam. If I have wronged society—and the Bidouxs—if money can make up for it in any degree, it shall."

"You are trying to bargain, are you?" Mrs. Blanfield said quietly. "You can do that with—Mr. Griffin."

Yet as she stood at the door she turned back as if impulsively.

"I admire your strength, Mr. Tirwin; I admire what you have done in South Africa, just as I despise your weakness, your dishonesty."

And she was gone, while I remember the little old lady, Mrs. Durant, looked back at us over her fan.

For a time we were silent, and in that time

Tirwin was considering his position and getting his self-control.

At last he said with a dry little laugh:

"Our interesting hostess, in trying to right the wrongs of humanity, set an admirable little trap, and perhaps caught me."

Then he looked around at us coolly, prepared to drive a bargain, as he had in the other critical issues of his life.

"Well?" said Griffin.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MIND OF A FINANCIER.

We had snatched so much out of his mysterious past. He was accustomed to say that he had not begun life until he had reached South Africa. Yet I hardly know how far, if he should have denied what had occurred at Mrs. Blanfield's, we could have shown that this was the same man with the little clerk who had robbed his employer in Brighton years before. I know at least that I, who had felt elated when Mrs. Blanfield had sprung the mine, as it were, now was not so sure. I felt the influence of that keen, uneasy intellect, which was preparing as well as it could to escape from the pit into which we had cast it. I wondered, after all, whether Griffin, as quick-witted as he was, could be

quite equal to the occasion. The episode of Therese Bidoux, indeed, had played into his journalistic hands; he was so much nearer the papers in the strong box. But as we three sat alone there in the dining room, we two pitted against him, I was not so sure that Tirwin was cornered. His quick recovery after his display of weakness was so sudden, so unexpected; he was ready to manage this problem, as he had many another, in this fight with the world. If in Fraser of Glencoe's case he had let himself be carried away by his resentment, he rarely let his mere personal feeling interfere with the more important matter of the advancement of his interests. You know that now if you have followed this narrative. Twice, to be sure, he had been weak. But he thought with the power wealth had builded around him that he could manage that little episode. Now I could see in my mind's eye his agent settling up at any cost the claim the milliner of Brighton had against his defaulting clerk. It seemed to me that Griffin's weapon against

this shrewd person was not a very efficient one.

After Griffin's "Well?" he still was silent for some moments, and then he said slowly, exactly as I expected:

"I dare say, Mr. Griffin, you expect to use this for newspaper purposes."

"Not entirely," said Griffin slowly, measuring his opponent; "but I can make a deuce of a scandal out of it, Mr. Tirwin. You know how the Enterprise stands. I can say: Do you take this fellow's, this defaulting clerk's word against Sir William Trent's, against Mr. Berner's, against Lord Glencoe's? I promise you that will be screamed all over the United Kingdom."

"What's the price?" said Tirwin slowly; "what's the price, my friend?"

"If the Enterprise had a money price, you would have found it out a long time ago, Mr. Tirwin."

"Yes, I probably should," he agreed, and then he looked at me with a cool, calculating stare. "A personal friend of Lord Glencoe's

is dragged into this interview," he said quietly. "It is, I see, the price of my withdrawal of my opposition to the course the raiders adopted in Nitara."

"It's a news price, too."

"Oh, I understand," Tirwin said with a little laugh. "I understand perfectly. You want the first publication of the news of my change of opinion."

"I want more than that," Griffin said. "I want, Mr. Tirwin, an exact facsimile of the papers you have from the Transvaal Republic, giving you concessions in Nitara."

"How did you know I had them?" Then remembering, then seeing in a flash that he had been betrayed by one he had betrayed, he himself answered his question with, "Ah, Isidor!"

Griffin bit his lips in his chagrin; he had not intended to harm the secretary. Now he said weakly:

"I didn't say that." And immediately in his own mind he decided that Isidor Goldstein should have a position on the Enterprise

if he wanted it—that he should have protection against the resentment of his present master. But, as it proved, this same Isidor was well able to take care of himself. And I did not know it, but Griffin had the affidavit of the secretary of the presence of those concessions in London.

"You needn't say it; I know it," said Isidor's master. He sat down and passed his hand through his hair.

"What happens if I do permit this, supposing those papers to exist?"

"I think you can arrange the Brighton matter; I believe that Mme. Bidoux can be silenced by Mrs. Blanfield."

"Oh, not that," he said almost petulantly. "I have already decided to settle twenty thousand pounds on Mrs. Bidoux and her children. As for M. Deral, the milliner, I paid him back with interest long ago. He never will prosecute, never. He never knew exactly whence this gift from heaven came, save that I was his devil turned angel. That matter is not of so much account. Don't you

see, Mr. Griffin, I am a man of large, yes, tremendous interests? My stocks represent thousands of investors. I will state it frankly, not because I want you to see that point, but because you will see it sooner or later. So why not advance it? Well, then, my commercial credit will be injured, don't you see, while it seems to me—it seems to me that the publication of so far-sighted a plan as the obtaining of the Boer concessions will tend to increase my credit—the credit of my stocks. They will say: Why, Tirwin failed, but his other things are not hurt. If he had succeeded, his stocks would have been stronger. D'ye understand?"

I wonder if we quite understood as we watched him there in Mrs. Blanfield's dining room. His principal interest in this world was financial, that was all; that was the whole secret. Everything sank before that—love, hate—all. And we saw, as he had stated, that the publication of the fact that he had gone to Africa a fugitive from justice, with stolen capital, that this would destroy some-

what the confidence in the stability of his stocks.

"On the other hand," he went on, stating our case against him, "if I acknowledge those concessions—if your Enterprise prints them—I shall be hated by everybody in South Africa, by everybody in England; but the British investor, while hating me politically, will see the far-sightedness of my plans, and will trust my stocks the more.

"Griffin"—he took a step nearer the journalist—"I agree to your proposition. You"—but he looked at me—"shall never publish what you have found out to-night. I, on my part, give you the facts about those concessions—yes, copies of the papers themselves. I stipulate, however, that I see the copy of the article you print day after tomorrow, or rather that we prepare it together."

"I agree to it. This matter ends here," Griffin said, with a ring of satisfaction in his voice.

"I think I win, in the end," the other

said. "It must appear that I do this voluntarily."

"But every vestige of your old position in the Nitara affair is swept away."

"Every vestige," said the Portuguese. "I stand with Lord Glencoe. Now, what time will it be convenient for you to be, say, at my offices in the city—ten o'clock?"

"I will be there, Mr. Tirwin."

"Now," the other said, "assure Mrs. Blanfield that Mme. Bidoux and her children shall have the twenty thousand pounds settled on them. I do that as a matter of personal precaution as well. Now, let me think, we understand each other: I change my position; I become the most hated man in Great Britain." And he laughed almost lightly. "But I strengthen my financial position. I do Lord Glencoe and you all a favour. I put you under obligations."

"From your point of view, perhaps."

"Good-night." But he did not look at me; perhaps he excepted me from this general amnesty.

At the door he suddenly turned.

"Griffin!"

"Yes, Mr. Tirwin?"

"You are a very valuable man. I would like to have you in my employ."

"I am obliged, Mr. Tirwin," the correspondent said with an inclination of the head. And then, as Tirwin passed out, he said:

"Dishonest to the core, filled with petty vices and resentments, he yet puts dishonesty and pettiness away before the policy of one of the world's great financiers. That's his idea, his motive, and he makes even his defeat—the defeat of his little purposes—a triumph for that. Don't you see that he will claim of Berner and Glencoe a service out of this. And he doesn't object to personal disrepute if he is respected financially."

"I underestimated him," I said. "I dislike him as if he were a snake. But, Griffin, you are right—he is a remarkable man."

As we passed out, Mrs. Blanfield met us.

"You have it arranged?" she said.

Griffin told her of it all, so far as it had gone.

"I hope you understood me, Mr. Barton," she said, turning to me. "Mme. Bidoux has so excited my sympathy. We will perhaps throw that man in jail. He is one of the most powerful men in all England. He had the prosecution for that old affair all bought off, I think—the witnesses, I mean. And yet I wanted to do this. I wasn't sure it would succeed. But I hope you understand; it was just a feeling that justice ought to be exacted for that poor woman, who has no other friend than I, and she's served me faithfully."

"My dear lady," I said, "I honour you for it. And you did it admirably."

"I seem to have helped Mr. Griffin, too, in his profession," she said, with a little nervous laugh. "I mentioned Mme. Bidoux's conviction that this was the man who had destroyed her husband, and he seized on it as a bit of evidence."

"How do you account," said I, as we left the Park Lane house, "for a man so

clever having committed that theft in Brighton?"

"An indiscretion of youth," my friend said; "that was in keeping. And he showed emotion, too, when he saw Mme. Bidoux. But I think we have it all arranged. By the way, you know my engagement with Tirwin to-morrow is at ten. You'll have to see Lord Stavers and Blanding for me—to have them arrange their programme for the morning of the day after to-morrow—after the Enterprise has published this."

Then I saw in the glare of the street lamps his face flush and his eyes sparkle over his success. But the Frasers of Glencoe and the question itself were minor matters; he cared for a "newspaper beat," as they say in New York.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW I VISITED IN PERTHSHIRE.

THAT distinguished leader, Lord Stavers, listened in astonishment to the news I bore him the next morning. I went around to his town house early, and found him at a littered desk, a small, fat, round, red-faced man, who listened attentively to what I said. Of course I did not tell him of the hold we had on Tirwin; we were in honour bound not to state that. I only told him what Tirwin had consented to have published in the interest of his stocks, and he saw how this would deprive the prosecution of one of its valuable points.

"What a scoundrel that man is!" he said. "Yet I can't help admiring his very remarkable ability. I will see Blanding myself. You

may tell Griffin that we will be prepared to follow up, hammer and tongs, what the Enterprise will print to-morrow morning. I have another piece of news for him."

This was something rather better than what we had secured. An arrangement had been arrived at through which Russia retained the narrow strip on the Persian frontier in consideration of her Government supporting Great Britain in Nitara, as Mr. Berner had predicted the previous day.

"And you see if Lord Glencoe had not occupied Nitara as he did this never would have come about. He and his followers will receive at the worst but a trivial punishment, if any at all. Should we go further, the popular feeling would destroy the Government in an hour."

I carried all this news some hours later to Lady Glencoe at Kensington. She had just returned from a visit to her husband, and how her eyes shone as she heard my story!

"You dear Jack Barton!" she cried,

"how much you have done for us, how much!"

Then she made so winsome a picture that I more than half envied Fraser of Glencoe. But I told her that my part of it was small enough; that it was all due to Griffin's journalistic perception. Yet she wouldn't have that—it was I; and, though I knew it wasn't I found myself flushing with pleasure.

What followed was the flaming news in the Enterprise the next morning. All the rest is now so much a matter of history that what I may say can shed small light on it. Fraser of Glencoe had established his principle, or rather he had maintained the long-established British one. He had added rich Nitara to the Empire. He and his leaders and his followers had fought for the practice that wherever British interests are they must be protected by some strong government. The British Empire may be divided; the colonies may separate from it, as the United States did, teaching by its very separation the home Government a lesson in colonial control; or

the Empire may hold together for centuries and centuries, but the Empire was founded and held together by that one idea—the rights of the Briton at home and abroad. If Dr. Jameson and his associates were punished for a similar attempt, circumstances had changed in MacIvor Fraser of Glencoe's time.

And this was done in Belaland and Nitara by a man who came there in disgrace. Yet now if you mention one of the great English governors—not less a man, indeed, than Lord Clive—you must tell of Lord Fraser of Glencoe. The company system has been abandoned; Belaland extends to the north over many miles (I haven't my geography at my elbow), and reaches now to beyond Lake Tanganyika.

As for Tirwin, the Portuguese, he still survives, his wealth and power prodigious. The revenge that time had wrought on this rather villainous person is that he has lost his health. He failed in his plans against Fraser, but it was not in his nature to fail financially;

he is disliked and hated, but men bow down to his power. Yet I don't believe he again will measure conclusions with Fraser of Glencoe. Tirwin is cunning and ever wise when he has learned a lesson—when he has measured his strength against another man's.

And there is my good friend Willing, a capital little chap; he married the girl in Cloutsie. And there is Griffin, the correspondent, who just has brought out an entertaining book of reminiscences. He married, as of course he was bound to, that charming and charitable widow, Mrs. Blanfield.

Now, speaking of marrying and giving in marriage, I am rather out of that kind of thing. In my earlier years I might have. I preferred my freedom, or perhaps I may better state it, lest some of them see these lines, they preferred theirs. When later I met her who was worth while, she belonged to my best friend.

I don't get away so often now. My father's family's affairs keep me in New York

a deal; I am not so free to knock about, but this summer I visited Glencoe House, Perthshire.

As we sat one evening after dinner, I said to Lord Glencoe:

"Now confess, Fraser, you made Maisie that girl you saw by the river at Oxford because out of your mystical old soul you wanted her to be; and you made Maisie think as she did about seeing you."

"No," said Glencoe, looking over to Maisie (who may be rather older, but not to my eyes), "she was the girl."

"Yes," said Lady Glencoe, "it is true, between us, I saw him then on the river bank."

Well, well, if they believe it, they may, of course; I am half inclined to agree with them. How can we say what may be, what may not be?

Such is the account of my own experiences during these remarkable events in Belaland and Nitara. I have added my personal observations, being Lord Glencoe's warm

friend, to the mass of matter already published about those occurrences.

May I add pedantically:

To him who dares all things all things may come—*may*, you know. But, 'tis as old as the race, that Fortune shows her sorriest, her most exasperating face only to the coward. Oh, well, he wasn't that. Fraser of Glencoe has proved his case; has challenged Fortune, and won from that disdainful lady.

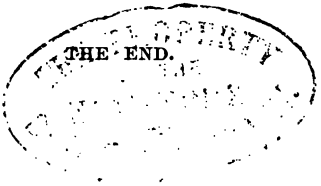
I have tried to write a story of no particular one of England's perplexities, please to bear in mind. But rather here has been a story—have you had the good patience to read it?—of a man made like some others. I myself like that kind of a story, of the cornered man who turns, or who goes on simply performing his duty, like a sailor of the Maine in Havana harbour. We are all so like to be cornered some time or other by our natures or outside circumstances. Oh, well, let's fight to the end; let's say I have done this or that. I'll acknowledge what I have done, but I am ready for all that offers.

But I am talking too much. The story has stopped; why shouldn't I, who am not a writer, but simply a plain, knockabout chap, who knows something of these events in Belaland and Nitara?

And Tirwin—he might tell the story differently.

But I have forgotten; I have ended. Of Maisie Halton you have heard, of Fraser of Glencoe, of Tirwin, of the policy of the Empire.

The sweet soft wind blows out of the south. The stars are filling the sky. The day and its story are done.



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